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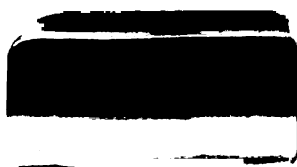
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**JOHN BELL OF TENNESSEE
HIS CAREER IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

BY

CARL ESEK PRAY

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS**

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

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Early Life

Of the early life of John Bell of Tennessee, as he was proud to call himself very little can be stated. He was born near Nashville, Tennessee, February 15, 1797. His mother's maiden name was Margaret Edmiston, a native of Virginia, of Scotch-Irish ancestry and of a good family. His father was a prosperous farmer for the times who sent his son to Cumberland College - now the University of Nashville, where he was graduated at the age of seventeen. He forthwith studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1816 when he was but nineteen years old opening an office at Franklin, Williamson County, Tennessee.* It is evident that he was passing thru his college experiences during the stirring days of the war of 1812, that he was admitted to the bar in the very year when the new national feeling had reached its height following the war and it may be safely asserted that he was vitally interested in the political problems of the day. If it is true that a man's deepest impressions are received during his college days, it is easy to account for the fact that John Bell was a consistent Union man throughout the whole of his long political career up to that fatal day when he thought himself forced to secede with Tennessee from the Union for which he had fought so long.

* American Annual Cyclopaedia 1869. p. 69 ff.

The proof that he was actively interested in political matters and that he had more than usual ability, lies in the fact that he was elected to the Tennessee State Senate and served in that position when he was but twenty years of age. He was offered a second term but refused it and applied himself to his law work for ten years when he was elected to the United States House of Representatives at the age of twenty-nine.

Election. 1827.

Bell's opponent in his first election to Congress was the famous Old-Republican War-Horse, Felix Grundy, who in the days when Bell was conjugating Latin verbs and studying the principles of government, was helping to lead the country to stand up for its rights and national honor against Great Britain. The Federalists of 1812 were fond of calling the war, Mr. Madison's War, brought on by Felix Grundy and the Devil. Grundy had resigned from Congress after being re-elected in 1813 and was considered the strongest man next to Jackson in the Nashville district.*

Bell's campaign was conducted with great energy, his platform consisting chiefly of denunciations of Adams and Clay and their alleged corrupt bargain and of extravagant praise of Jackson. He declares that Adams and Clay have trodden under foot the constitution and defeated the so-
* Caldwell, American Historical Review IV. 654.

vereign will of the people. * In a letter to the people of Nashville he writes that the purity of our elections has been violated - a theme on which he is destined to make many speeches - and hints that Adams and Clay advocate that representatives need not be bound by the wishes of the people, a heresy beyond all condemnation. ** As Adams and Clay are denounced in true western style, Jackson is lauded with equal emphasis. Jackson meets "great emergencies as though they had been created but to distinguish him", but most interesting of all, Bell sees Jackson "evincing the greatest caution and deliberation," characteristics which he fails to observe later on. *** In spite of Grundy's great reputation and the fact that Jackson favored Grundy, * Bell carried the election by a large majority. ** Note 1.

The General Situation.

Bell had come into Congress in a propitious time and from the most favored state in the Union. The West was coming into its own on a great tidal wave of democratic votes and Tennessee supplied the crest to the wave. Ken-

* Past History. p. 1.

** Congressional Globe. 1844. p. 551. Read by Andrew Johnson at a time when the old slander against Clay was being revived.

*** Past History. p. 3.

**** Caldwell, Bench and Bar in Tennessee. p. 203.

***** Niles Register. Vol. 32. p. 417. Aug. 25, 1827.

Note 1. An interesting side light on this election is given by Greeley in his American Conflict. I. 179, where he states that Bell received the votes of a number of colored electors and used long after to confess his obligations to them.

tucky, seemingly, might have taken Tennessee's place in this great movement, even more favorably situated commercially and agriculturally, with much the same geological formation of soil and with less mountainous territory, settled at about the same time and with an abundance of ambitious men, still she failed to meet the needs of the movement. It may be that her population had come to her too directly from the East and had held too much to the political ideas of the past, it may be that Clay came too quickly to national leadership and having experienced the joys of fulfilled ambition before his section was in a position to place him at the very pinnacle of national power, became influenced by the older ideas and could not fitly represent the suddenly self-conscious West. If the new Northwest of that day had been as prosperous and as strong politically as the new Southwest was, even Tennessee with her homogeneous population of men who had passed by gradual steps into the West and who had been so long cut off from the East as to have developed a new political point of view untrammelled by past traditions, might never have commanded the nation as she did. Andrew Jackson did not make Tennessee, nor did Tennessee make the West, but both were typical and both were products of their times and circumstances. It is not surprising however, that when the time came for the West to assert her-

self that Tennessee was prepared to do her part. Professor Minor of the University of Virginia traveling in Tennessee in 1823, remarks that every town of five or six hundred inhabitants supported a newspaper, and that he found men discussing public problems with earnestness and intelligence whose appearance would, in Virginia, mark them as totally ignorant and indifferent to public questions. He adds that in Virginia not one in ten of the land-owners even, takes a paper. *

Bell's Ideas of Government on
Entering Congress.

A bitter enemy of Bell's later, writes that on entering Congress Bell proclaimed himself against the Federalist administration of Adams, against the United States Bank, a protective tariff, internal improvements by the National Government and an overflowing treasury. As to monopolies and "special privileges" he is said to have declared that the true American policy would be to place "some limitation upon the accumulation of capital, rather than a bounty for its benefit". He was an avowed member of the State^s Rights School, a leveler and a fire-eater.** These words will not bear close scrutiny. In 1828 - after Adams and Clay's administration was in a minority, after a long and acrimonious debate brought on by a motion for

* Atlantic Monthly 26:171, 174.

** Past History. p. 3.

retrenchment, Bell urges that the majority should be generous towards a weakened adversary lest the people be embittered and stirred to useless rage. * This tone of moderation runs all thru Bell's speeches, quite in contrast to the typical western "leveler" or "fire-eater". He refers to himself as a member of the States Rights School, and often refers to our government as "the Confederacy" or "this great Confederacy" but calls on the country for a leader who will renounce the extremes of both the ultra national and the extreme states rights idea and unite the country on the principle of a compromise between the two as it was understood by the men who framed it that it should be.**

Internal Improvements.

Bell had too many of the attributes of a scholar to become an ideal politician. It was natural to him to reflect and weigh any problem that came before him, and the inevitable result of that is to see that there are two sides to almost every proposition that can arise, political or moral. The effect of this is somewhat blighting to a man who aspires to be a leader of a political party in excited times when partisan feeling is greatly stirred and demands as a matter of course that its side and its leaders be entirely right and the opposition absolutely wrong. This trait of Bell's which he more or less overcomes, when he becomes leader of the

fight against Jackson later, is shown thruout the greater number of his speeches. He begins his opposition to the bill for the repair of the Cumberland Road by admitting that the great majority of the people believe that national internal improvements are constitutional and the attitude of the majority of the House would seem to be that they considered that a settled matter. Bell thinks it a great mistake to make such an assumption. There can be nothing in the argument that the United States has acquired the right to build or repair the road thru obtaining the consent of the states affected, for that would establish the idea that the powers of the United States may be limited or restricted by the vote of the states. ****

The great question, however, is not one of constitutionality, but one of justice and policy. One-third of the states look upon national internal improvements as an imposition and in that case, internal improvements, far from binding the bonds of the Union closer as its advocates urge, will inevitably tend to loosen the bonds. He stigmatizes internal improvements as little else than " a system of downright pillage and plunder carri-

* Past History. p. 3.

** Deb. Cong. IV - I. 1250 - Jan. 29, 1828.

*** Ibid. Vol. V. 349. Feb. 10, 1829.

**** Ibid. Vol. V. p. 338. Feb. 10, 1829.

ed on in the regular forms of legislation, by one portion of the Union, against their fellow citizens of other sections." * He warns the members that the real object of the advocates of internal improvements is to get all they can for their particular sections and when they have accomplished that they will turn against the system. In Congress they talk about the "great national principle", "inter-state commerce", "strengthening the bonds of the Union", "transportation in war", etc., but before their constituents they talk of how the money invested will furnish work for the people, stimulate business, turn population their way, etc.

Bell brings himself into the ranks of a true prophet when he describes the log-rolling, lobbying and political combinations that will be formed when members are elected largely for their ability to secure appropriations for their sections and the chief business of Congress becomes the distribution of the surplus. In spite of these evils, Bell admits that the people are determined on help from the government and therefore proposes that the United States appropriate the money to the states to be used by them for this purpose; they can do it cheaper and more efficiently and an equitable division can be made according to a system, and the scramble for spoils be avoided. ** A few months later when Baltimore asked the Govern-
* Deb. Cong. V. 346. 8 ** Deb. Cong. V. 344. Feb. 10, 1829.

ment for a subscription for stock, Bell said he had never supported a measure of this sort, but if any measure of internal improvements deserved help from the Government this did, because the city started the enterprise without expecting national aid. * The matter never came to a vote but Bell's sentiments indicate that he is not a hard and fast opponent of internal improvements.

When Jackson's celebrated veto of the Maysville Road bill was before the House, Bell felt called upon to defend Jackson's course and declared Jackson was not opposed to internal improvements but only to the unequal and distracting mode in use. Bell took occasion to again declare that the only practical method was to distribute the money among the states. **

In Bell's mind canals seemed to demand different treatment at the hands of Congress from roads. He agreed to vote to take back the unsold land that the United States had granted Illinois in 1827 to assist in building a canal from Lake Michigan to the Illinois river, at the rate of \$1.25 per acre, payable in scrip receivable ^{the} by United States for debts due on public land. He stated that this would violate no constitutional principle because the canal would raise the price of land so the

* Deb. Cong. VI.- II. 1137. May 26, 1830.

** Ibid. p. 1145. May 28, 1830.

United States would get the money back. It would seem that the embarking of the United States on this sort of a speculative enterprise would be as unconstitutional and as open to log-rolling combinations as any other internal improvement enterprise. Bell said he could not vote for it if amended to give money in place of scrip, but the bill never reached the third reading. *

Bell is still more liberal when it comes to river and harbor improvement or else the pressure of circumstances becomes too great for him. He stated concerning a river and harbor bill that he had not asked for money to improve the Cumberland River though it would be of great value to his section, because he did not believe in internal improvements by the nation, the Government estimates are untrustworthy because written by men who want to get the contracts and it does no good to spend money on the Mississippi, anyway, as the improvements were swept away by every flood. ** However, Bell believes that clearing the great rivers is as constitutional as harbor bills for the ocean or lake ports and he would not oppose the bill. *** Bell moved that the improvements be confined to such works as are thought

* Deb. of Cong. VII. 412. Jan. 5, 1831. ** Deb. Cong. VIII-II. - 2443. *** Ibid. p. 2718. May 2, 1832.

expedient by the Secretary of War in order that some responsible man might answer to the people for the proper use of the money. Little attention was paid to his idea and the motion was lost.*

In Bell's great attack on the Jackson administration in 1836 when he had been read out of the party, he makes the charge that the party has departed from its original principles in regard to internal improvements and while coming into power denouncing the Adams administration for expending \$250,808 in 1828, the Democratic party was now (1836) proposing to appropriate \$1,966,328.92 for the same purpose. ** The same idea is expressed in 1840 when the Cumberland Road bill is again before the House. He considers it useless to combat the bill on the grounds of its constitutionality. He believes that the South has forced the North into combinations for internal improvements by its narrow adhesion to the letter of the constitution and that millions would be saved if the South would join in a reasonable plan for objects worthy of national bounty.*** Bell's course on internal improvements seems, on the whole, very consistent during the period covered here from 1828 to 1840. During that time he was first in opposition to the Adams Administration,

* Deb. of Cong. VIII - II. 2720.

** Ibid. XII - III. 2817; March 16, 1836.

*** Cong. Globe. 207. Feb. 17, 1840.

then a leader of the majority in the House, and again in the minority, a severe test of consistency.

The Tariff and Nullification.

The tariff controversey of 1832 gave Bell an opportunity for a masterly speech. In 1831 the House of Representatives of the Tennessee Legislature passed resolutions "instructing" the Tennessee Senators and requesting the Representatives to do their best to get the tariff reduced to the standard of necessary revenue and "the encouragement of such domestic manufactures alone as are indispensable to our national independence". * Bell waited until near the close of the debate and then unburdened his mind of a speech that occupies forty columns of the official records. Two new principles have come into the National life, one is the belief in the infallibility of the Supreme Court and the other is the doctrine of nullification. Both parties believe in the Union but each must dictate the terms. He believes that he represents a moderate group that can hold the balance between the two extremes.** While thus proclaiming himself the champion of moderation he proceeds to assail the leaders of the "American System" as "reckless and wicked agitators" the result of whose work will eventually establish social and financial inequalities here such as are seen in Europe.

* Niles Register 42: 253 Dec. 3, 1831.

** Debates of Cong. VIII-III. p. 3350. June 8, 1832.

He holds that any true American System would "contain some limitation upon the accumulation of capital, rather than a bounty for its benefit". He would prefer a tax on incomes to a tariff tax in order to promote equality. He startles one with the statement that an extraordinary and sudden increase in the wealth of an individual is "a libel on the equity and wisdom of the laws and policy of any country." * An interesting phase of the home market argument urged so strongly by the protectionists to catch the western farmer's vote since the closing of the English market on account of the corn laws, appears in Bell's contention that the southern planters have more than made up for the loss thru their increased consumption of northern food-stuffs. ** He makes the customary mistake of the southern man of the time of attributing the low economic condition of the old South and the new Southwest, as well as the prosperity of the Northeast, to the workings of the tariff. The fact that the North wants it and the South does not, seems to be all the proof he needs. He asserts that the tariff is no benefit to the country west of the Alleghanies but the West is looking for a system of roads at national expense to

* Debates of Cong. VIII-III. p. 3360. June 8, 1832.
** Ibid. p. 3371.

indemnify it. * His great appeal is to the sense of justice of the majority, the minority must not be pushed too far, for when the Government becomes a tyranny "the proscribed interests and section must be expected to redress their grievances in any manner they are able". He makes these words even more significant by suggesting that since the present minority is in our compact section it has great facilities for redress.** He says that the people now have redress against the capitalistic system the tariff induces thru their ability to go West but some day that resource will fail and a painful adjustment will have to be made. *** If Bell were alive to-day he might say "I told you so", with much emphasis. Bell took no part in the discussions preceding the tariff of 1893, except to propose that since the committee of the whole could make very little headway after five weeks' discussion, the ways and means Committee should be instructed to report a bill. For his pains he was told by Carson of North Carolina that for his part he would not leave the affairs of the country in the hands of four or five political jugglers if Bell was to be one of them. ****. Bell had been made chairman of the judiciary

* Debates of Cong. VIII-III. p. 3374. June 8, 1832.

** Ibid. p. 3383. ***

*** Ibid. IX- II. 1699. Feb. 12, 1833.

Committee December 10, 1832, and in consequence becomes prominent when Jackson's message relative to the enforcement of the tariff in South Carolina comes before the House. After a long discussion in which attempts were made to refer the message to a special committee, it was turned over to the Judiciary Committee which reported February 8, 1833. Although Bell as chairman gave the report, he was evidently not in favor of its import as will be shown later. He states that the report is of a majority only, and Ellsworth of Connecticut (who was a member of the Committee) declares that but two members of the committee, Daniels of Kentucky and Coulter of Pennsylvania, fully favored the report. * The report as read gave no additional power to the executive, refusing the use of military force and declaring that if the tariff cannot be collected by ordinary means the matter should be decided by action of the courts. Since South Carolina says she will not use military force except in repelling attack, the committee will not give her any excuse to prepare for such an emergency. It is significant that the committee fears that the use of force will bring on a conflict between the two sections of the Union and destroy it. Since the law is so harsh as to force South Carolina to "resist at every hazard" the government should not look for means to enforce it but to

* Debs. Cong. IX-II. 1677, Feb. 11, 1833.

modify it. The committee will give no power to remove the custom house or to exact cash duties, as that would be discrimination against South Carolina and unconstitutional. *

Bell's disagreement with the report is shown first, when he objects to the printing of the report, an acrimonious debate followed and the matter was dropped without action. ** The next ten days are taken up with heated discussions on the tariff and the United States Bank, but mainly the tariff, and on the 21st of February Bell moved that the Senate bill for the enforcement of the tariff be printed for the use of the members. *** The motion failed. Bell was in great perplexity and consulted J. Q. Adams as ^{he} had done earlier, first trying to get the consent of the Mississippi delegation to the bill reducing the price of the public land in return for the tariff, and at this juncture asking Adams if he would consent to a bill limiting the provisions of the tariff to January 8, 1835. **** The Massachusetts delegation cannot agree on terms.

February 25th Bell succeeded with a motion to take up the Senate coercion bill.***** Every effort was made

* Report of Committees of House of Reps. 2nd. sesn. 22nd Cong. Report No. 85. Bill to be found in House Docs. 85. Serial No. 234. to accompany bill H. R. No. 730.
** Deb. Cong. IX. II. 1676. Feb. 11, 1833. *** Deb. Cong. IX.-II. 1755. **** J. Q. Adams Memoirs. VIII. 520-526.

to postpone the discussion but Bell urged the measure as necessary and secured its consideration as the special order of the day for February 26.

There was great objection from the South Carolina men who wished the tariff bill passed first. Bell seems to be manager of the party. He is called one of the organs and fast-friends of the President. The next day the tariff bill was passed and then motions were made to postpone the consideration of the coercion bill. The previous question was moved. McDuffie made repeated motions to adjourn. For a time there was so much confusion that the reporter could not hear Bell who was speaking but when he could be heard he was saying that if the House would discuss the measure and not postpone action he would not force the previous question. The ^{adjourned} House/for lack of a quorum, & Bell urged consideration again the next day but failed. On the 28th it was carried for the third reading and on March 1, 1833, the bill was passed 149-48. **

The provisions of this bill in connection with Bell's leadership in getting it thru show pretty clearly that either Bell never had been in sympathy with the

***** Deb. Cong. IX-II 1767. Feb. 25, 1833.

* Deb. Cong. IX-II p. 1812. Feb. 26, 1833.

** Ibid. p. 1897.

House Judiciary Committee report or else that he had greatly changed his mind. It was on Bell's motion that the House bill was laid on the table and the drastic Senate bill taken up. * Under the bill as passed the custom house might be moved, duties were to be paid in cash, the President might employ the land or naval force or the national militia if necessary. etc. ** Bell's thoro work in this matter might well have pleased Jackson and certainly it was John Bell who upheld Jackson's hands in the House of Representatives during the critical days of Nullification.

The United States Bank.

Bell was begining the practice of law in Tennessee in the days when the United States Bank was gaining the name of "The Monster". Perhaps no state during the financial difficulties of 1819-21 has more openly hostile to that institution than Tennessee, and to her statesmen, and especially to Andrew Jackson, was due its downfall. Bell seems never to have imbibed that deep hatred and distrust for the Bank that many of the Western men held, or pretended to hold, after Jackson began open war on the bank. His opposition to the Bank was rather perfunctory up to the order for the removal of the deposits, when he came into strong opposition to Jackson and championed the Bank

* Deb. Cong. IX-II 1765-Feb. 25, 1833.

** Deb. Cong. IX-II to the Approved March 2, 1833.

There was no doubt as to how Tennessee stood on the bank question. In October 1831 a resolution was introduced into the lower house of the Tennessee legislature to the effect that Tennessee's Senators be instructed (a favorite term with the Western legislatures before 1860) and her Representatives be requested to use all possible means to prevent the re-chartering of the United States Bank if any attempt should be made before the next session of the Tennessee legislature. * The motion was tabled at the time, but in December it passed the House and was lost in the Senate by a tie vote. ** That the sentiment grew is shown by a later vote, (September 1833) when the same motion was put and carried unanimously, every member being present. ***

Bell in no way shows hostility to the United States Bank, as such. The "Life of Bell" gotten out in opposition to him when running for President in 1860 bitterly denounces Bell for his course on the Bank, as it does for everything else he ever did. It charges that he stradd-

* Niles Register 42: 162. Oct. 29, 1831.

** Ibid. 42: 326. Dec. 31, 1831.

*** Ibid. 45: 188 Sep. 21, 1833. Whether this means both houses is not apparent. The Wis. Hist. Library does not contain the records of the Tennessee legislature for these years.

led the question, that his speech and influence were for the Bank, his ineffectual vote, only, being against it. ** Bell virtually admits this in a speech in December 1839 when he says that Jackson was against him for speaker in 1834 because he would not join whole-heartedly in the President's War on the Bank.*

The "Past History" also charges that Bell tried to make friends with the Bank by uniting with McLane while Secretary of the Treasury to keep the Bank from being an issue in the Presidential election.** This may easily be true, not because he wanted help from the Bank, politically, or otherwise, but because he was in the same position that many of the other Democratic leaders found themselves in, they saw no reason for assaulting the Bank and saw many reasons why they should not, yet Jackson had thrown down the gauntlet and they had to stay on his side. Certainly the leading men of the party did not want the Bank destroyed, least of all did they want it a political issue in the election. *** Jackson had started the War, and Nicholas Biddle, the President of the Bank, concluded he could get a re-charter in no other way and Henry Clay thought **** Past History p. 4.
* Cong. Globe. . . Dec. 20, 1839. p. 69.
** Past History. p. 4.
*** Catterall, Second Bank of the U. S. p. 193. A majority of the Cabinet were in favor of the Bank in 1829. Some in 1831. Ibid. 219.

it would make good material for campaign purposes for him, while many of the Democratic leaders both desired to keep the Bank, and feared Biddle and Clay were right as to the campaign. *

The confusion and readjustment in the Jackson party due to the Bank, are easily understood if Bell's account of the uncertainty in Tennessee is literally true. In 1838 in reply to Turney who had made a vicious attack on Bell's record, Bell said that the prominent business men of Nashville did not know, in 1832, what Jackson's sentiments concerning the Bank were. Felix Grundy attended a meeting of these men at Nashville and asked them not to commit themselves on the question for it would be taken as an expression of Jackson's views. If he was so careful to conceal his position on the Bank, it is not suprising that a man like Bell should refuse to be bound absolutely to an opinion formed later and made a test of party orthodoxy. Bell declares that he has always argued that the constitutionality of the Bank must be assumed to have been settled by the long acquiescence of the country. He has always believed in the expediency of a national bank but has said that he would never vote for another one until the people as a whole were satisfied that it would be a good thing and after there was no danger of its becoming
* Catterall Second Bank of the U. S. p. 225-6.

ing again a political issue. Even during the excitement of the summer of 1837 when the panic was at its worst and there came to be in his district a profound conviction that nothing but the re-establishment of the Bank could help the situation, he explained the situation to his people and how the Bank could not fail to become a great evil while it continued ^u to be a political issue and they agreed with him that he should oppose its re-establishment. *

In 1835, after Bell had accepted the speakership at the hands of the Whigs and was an advocate of White's succession to the Presidency, the Globe made a coarse attack on Bell and among other things accused Bell of favoring the Bank because Bell owed it \$55,000 in 1832, in 1834 he had obtained a loan of \$40,000 and that he had drawn in three or four other members of the Tennessee Delegation. Bell denied the charge, said he had never owed the Bank more than he could pay, personally, and that the amount he was charged with owing in 1832 was four times the real amount. He explained that his name had been used for the accomodation of others in a business way under a general power of attorney. Bills of exchange and drafts were drawn in his name on some mer-
* Cong. Globe. App. May 31, 1838. p. 358.

cantile house which had filed with the bank a written promise to pay before the draft was drawn. Ordinarily he would not know of the business until it was finished. * To anyone familiar with the way in which branch bank drafts were used as currency and the wholesale dealing in domestic bills of exchange by the second United States Bank as described in Catterall, The Second Bank of the United States, Bell's statement sounds perfectly natural. One rather wonders whether or not Bell was helping out the returns from his plantation with the exchange business as a side line. There certainly was no ground for believing that the Bank was extending favors to Bell in exchange for political support. However, all was wheat that came to the Globe's mill in a political fight and doubtless the charge had its effect on Jackson, if on no one else.

Legislative action against the Bank began with Clayton's motion for a select committee to examine into the affairs of the Bank and report to the House. ** Action was immediate and evidently pre-determined, for within four days Clayton reported with seven distinct charges against the Bank and fifteen matters that ought to

* Niles Register. 48:229. May 30, 1835. From Bell's reply to the Globe charges of May 4, 1895.

** Cong. VIII-II p. 846 Feb. 23, 1832.

be inquired into. * The Bank was charged with issuing branch bank orders as currency, with usury, with not fulfilling its charter in issuing currency, with using domestic bills of exchange as loans to get more than the legal rate of interest, of building houses to rent, of not having the legal proportion of coin and of allowing foreign stockholders to vote for directors. Any one of these abuses was assumed to be reason enough for causing the forfeiture of the Bank's charter. John Quincy Adams so riddled the report and so flayed the reporters that Clayton became a laughing stock and few were bold enough to press the chargers, ** although Jackson who up to this time seemed ready to accept a Bank, was convinced that they were all true.

Bell's first vote on a important measure had been against the sale of the United States Bank stock held by the Government. He now came forward as champion of postponement. He forever embittered Jackson by saying that if all the charges made by Clayton were true they would not furnish grounds for refusing to re-charter the Bank, they would only show that care must be taken in drawing up the terms of a new charter. He argues that the Presidential election ought not to be confused with the finan-

* Cong. VIII-II p. 1874. Feb. 27, 1832.

** Catterall, The Second Bank of the U. S. p.

cial one. There is no doubt in his mind but that the Bank is constitutional and he emphatically denies that Jackson has committed himself on the question of vetoing any bank bill and shows that it is entirely the fault of the Bank men that the question is pressed to an issue at this time. Since the charter has four years yet to run and in the meantime the national debt will be paid, there is no means of determining at this time just the sort of financial institution the country will need. "No enlightened friend of the President can advise him to sanction any charter which the present Congress shall present for his consideration".* This looks very much as though Bell knew Jackson would veto any bank bill at this time.

In spite of all this good advice the charter was urged. Bell said little while the discussion was on, he favors a provision in the charter allowing the states to tax United States Bank Stock held within their respective borders at the same rate they tax state bank stock. ** A motion by Bell that there should be a tax on the profits of the branches in each state not greater than the tax paid by the local banks was lost by a vote of 87-94.***

* Deb. Cong. VIII-II p. 2075. March 8, 1832.

** Ibid. VIII-III. p. 3842. July 2, 1832.

*** Ibid. p. 3848. July 2, 1832.

Bell was Speaker of the House at the time of the excitement over the removal of the deposits and took direct action against Jackson. He claimed in a speech made in December 1839 that part of the secret history of the Bank struggle was that the Committee of Ways and Means was deterred from reporting a resolution approving the removal of the public deposits by the stand he and a few others had taken on that matter. *

From start to finish Bell in no way disapproves of a central bank, does not question its constitutionality, and does not want to make a political fight over it. It is well known that a Jackson man had to be all for Jackson or he was no Jackson man at all and Bell's attitude on the Bank marks his definite separation from the Jackson party. It may be well to state that opposition to the United States Bank was in no sense a principle of the Jackson party when it came into power.

Indian Affairs.

John Bell was chairman of the House Committee on Indian affairs, during the greater part of his membership in the House. His natural spirit of fairness and breadth of view is shown admirably in his first debates on the Indian question. A petition had been introduced by a New York man asking that the United States Government

* Cong. Globe. p. 69. Dec. 20, 1839.

interpose to protect the southern Indians from injustice and outrage. The Georgia members were up in arms at once. Bell said that the committee was glad to receive all such memorials, and that the House must come to some definite stand in regard to the Indian question. Thru his influence a motion to call on the War Department for a general report on the condition of the Indians in the northern states was tabled, Bell arguing that it was an uncalled for motion and would only arouse ill-feeling and jeopardize the settlement of the Indian question. *

It is evident that "a settlement" of the Indian Question is contemplated and soon appears in the form of a bill introduced by Bell to provide for the removal of the Indian tribes within any of the states and territories and for their permanent settlement west of the Mississippi river. **

This was Jackson's simple, but very radical cure for all Indian complications and it was a policy persisted in by him with characteristic singleness of purpose. Bell was thoroly a Jackson man on the Indian question.

The first move in opposition to the bill was an effort to find out the status of Indians in the various states and have the various laws and regulations concerning them printed. ***

Bell took an active part in the debates and appears

* Deb. Cong. VI. p. 507. Jan. 11, 1830.

** Deb. Cong. VI-I p. 580. Feb. 24, 1830.

*** Ibid. VI-I. 595. March 3, 1830.

well informed. The fact that Hugh L. White of Tennessee was chairman of the Senate committee on Indian affairs, and that his committee reported a removal bill, makes it pretty evident that the Indian removal policy was strongly backed by Tennessee. On May 13th and 14th, 1830 Bell spoke seven hours in favor of the Indian removal bill, but his speech was not reported.*From replies to Bell's speech it is evident he said that the Indians could not be civilized,** He also gave an account of an exploring party that had been sent west of the Mississippi to find land adaptable for the Indians and that it had succeeded to Bell's satisfaction. From another reply to Bell I find Bell quoted as saying: "The fundamental principle that the Indians had no rights, by virtue of their ancient possession, either of soil or sovereignty, has never been abandoned, either expressly or by implication." In the same speech Bell is charged with saying that the earlier guarantees to the Indians by treaties are not binding.*** This Bell denies. Bell is quoted as saying that our treaties with the Indians are "expedients" to obtain peace and get the Indians' land, and that the guarantee of land to the Indians was very largely a device to intimidate the whites. It is difficult to know what is

* Deb. Cong. VI-II 993. May 14, 1830.

** Ibid. VI-II p. 1016. From a speech by Lumpkins of Georgia

*** Ibid VI-II p. 1037. From speech by Evans.

meant by this unless it was to keep the whites from interfering with the Indians and causing wars. The fight over this bill was long-continued and became very heated. On three occasions the speaker, Stevenson, gave the casting vote but on May 26, 1830 it passed by a vote of 103 - 97, the previous question being brought into use to force the vote.* It was the Senate bill that passed, giving the President very full power to act in cases where the Indians chose to exchange their lands for land west of the Mississippi. It is well known that the Indians were not given much choice but to go, by Andrew Jackson.

In 1831 severe criticisms were made in Congress concerning the action of Georgia and Jackson in their coercion of the Cherokees and Bell energetically defended them. He charged that the opposition to Indian removal was made up for party purposes and was being persisted in in the face of great danger of civil war. He was **satisfied** that the Indians were no more advanced in Georgia than they had been a hundred years earlier and that no benefit could come except by separating them from the whites.** In March Bell again gave a spirited defence of Jackson's Indian policy, this time in relation to the Choctaw Indians.***

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Deb, Cong, VI-II 1135.

** Deb. Cong. VII.p.774 . Feb.21, 1831.

*** Ibid. VII 845. March 2, 1831.

In Jan. 1832 Edward Everett endeavors to bring the whole Indian question up for a general debate by calling on the President to send to the House information concerning the Tennessee Chickasaw Indian treaty. In his call for information Everett manages to accuse Jackson of negotiating a treaty with the Chickasaws in 1830, of carrying out its terms without presenting it to the Senate, that the second auditor of the Treasury, who by the way was Major William B. Lewis, had fraudulently obtained from the Chickasaws four square miles of land containing valuable salt springs and that the Choctaws west of the Mississippi were being compelled to give up part of the land the government had given them when it located them in that region.*

Again it was Bell who took up the gauntlet so violently thrown down and championed the action of Jackson in every particular. He said the agreement with the Chickasaws "had not become even an Indian treaty yet."** He implies very directly that Indian treaties are not to be looked upon as comparable with treaties with foreign nations. He explains in detail the circumstances; the delay had been due to the fact that the Chickasaws did not like the land assigned to them and that negotiations were in progress to get other land from the Choctaws. He said

* Dep. Cong. VIII-II p. 1676. Jan. 21, 1832.

** Ibid. VIII-III. p. 1643.

that the guarantee to the Choctaws that they would never be asked to give up any of their land referred to giving it up to white men. Rather a slippery turn, one might think. Bell asserted that the lease of the salt lands was an honest transaction. I believe there would be some suspicion to-day if a high government official secured terms for himself from a dependent Indian tribe undergoing removal.

Bell seconds Everett's desire for a full investigation of the whole matter. * The resolution for investigation passed and Bell wished it referred to the committee on Indian affairs where it was clear to him that it belonged but Everett moved its reference to the committee on Public Lands. Bell insisted that he did not want the matter in his committee because he feared disclosures. The motion was carried to refer the resolution to the Public Lands committee. ** John Quincey Adams says that the outcome "was a severe annoyance to the Tennessean". Adams also states that Wyckliffe, the chairman of the Public Lands committee was going from Jackson over to Clay and that this bill "will give him a good vehicle for transit."*** The chief contestants in this set-to used very plain language to one another and were evidently

* Deb. Cong. VIII-II p. 1682. Jan. 31, 1832.

** Ibid. VIII-KK, p. 1844.

*** J. Q. Adams Memoirs VIII, p. 477.

deeply moved, they had no premonition that they would be shoulder to shoulder in 1860 in their efforts to "save the Union". The report of the committee was mild and insipid compared with the debate and carried the general idea that everybody was all right and that the matter was not of much importance, anyway. *

Bell's open-mindedness and his unfitness to be a genuine all-wool Jackson man are shown in his comments on the frightful abuses that existed in the Indian Department. The lack of good management and economy were mentioned and then he declared that the present administration was as culpable as the past administrations had been** He wished to see a thorough reform in the Department. Such criticism as that made in the open House would be exceedingly exasperating to Jackson and not to be tolerated.

In later years Bell becomes an ardent champion of the Indians' rights and a most outspoken advocate of reform. A report of the committee on Indian Affairs written by him in 1836 gives a sample of the frauds and abuses practiced by the government agents against the Indians. According to the treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek made in 1830 with the Choctaw Indians, every head of a family who did not desire to move west of the Mississippi might have one square mile of land etc. but he must register his application within six months of the date of the treaty. The agent did not

*Deb. Cong. VIII-III p. 3239. June 6, 1832.
** Ibid VIII-II p. 2312. March 30, 1832.

receive news of the treaty until three months had elapsed and then made arbitrary rulings not specified in the treaty. They must come to him at the agency to register, he would register only on individual application. One entire band of Indians were refused registration when they presented their names symbolically by bundles of sticks, as was their custom. He threw away their sticks, told them there were too many of them and that they should go west. On June 21, 1831 he wrote the War Department that he had just refused to register a band of two hundred (the time for registration had been extended) whom he thot had been induced to register by men who opposed removing the Indians. "And this I trust", he wrote " will be the last effort they will be able to make to thwart the views of the government." The bill introduced by Bell provided for a commission to settle upon the true claimants and satisfy the just demands of white men who had bought the land and made improvements. * There certainly would have been a sensation in the House of Representatives if Everett had possessed this information when Bell was white-washing Jackson and Lewis in 1832.

In 1836 Bell strongly urged a Congressional investigation into the frauds against the Creek Indians. He asserted that the chief cause of the prolonged war with the Creeks was due to the abuses connected with the land companies.**

* Reports of committees. House of Reps. 24th Cong. 1st session May 11, 1836. **Deb. Cong. XII-III 3461. April 29, 1836.

There was little chance of any action at this time that would in any way reflect on the Jackson Administration. Bell makes many charges of fraud and incompetency throughout the period of his opposition to the Jackson party but he in no way alters his early attitude concerning the removal of the Indians west of the Mississippi. In 1838 he denounced the idea of the Indians being allowed to found an independent state in Georgia. He sympathized with the people of Georgia in their action and thought they had done right.*

A southern and western man, with a large Indian population in his own state, it was almost inevitable that Bell should favor the removal of the Indians. The people of that day did not understand dealing with the Indians. They were a masterful people, determined to dominate and certain that the land belonged to them. Even in our own day justice is seldom done the Indian where the point of contact between the two races comes, unless there is close supervision by the government. At that time when the local idea was such a dominant one, with the whole south and west so characteristically frontier, there never could be peaceful relations between the settlers and the Indians and consequently one or the other must go.

* Cong. Globe .p.418. May 31, 1838.

The Right of Petition.

There could be no more severe test of a man's ability to stand up for his constitutional convictions than is afforded by the famous struggle over the right of petition. Bell was a southern man and a slaveholder but one of that large group of southern men who recognized that there was much of evil in the institution of slavery; In a speech at Nashville in 1835 just after his open break with Jackson he declared. "If we except the danger to the local society in which slavery is admitted, there is no peculiarity in our system from which we have anything to fear."* He always prided himself on his adherence to the constitution and he lived up to his principles. It is difficult to trace much of a record for Bell in the petition struggle for he made no speeches and kept as quiet as possible for a man of his determined convictions. His best record comes from his enemies in the south who denounce any leniency towards the men whom they termed abolitionists.

In the very opening of the controversy Bell voted to table the petitions without reference to a committee to avoid discussion. When Slade of Vermont moved to print the petition, which would bring on a general discussion, Bell voted with the majority to table that motion as well.

* Niles Register. 48: 330. July-11, 1835.

So far no question of constitutional principle had arisen*. Within two days it became evident to Bell that the constitution was being trodden upon, for he voted with Adams against tabling a petition against slavery in the District of Columbia and did the same thing again three days after that.** The fact that Hammond of South Carolina, a very extreme opponent of the right of petition where slavery was involved, voted the same way in order to force a direct vote in the House on the merits of the question, might lead one to think Bell was doing the same thing if his later record did not disprove it.

On Dec. 18, 1835, the House committed itself to the idea that a vote might be taken on the question as to whether or not a petition concerning slavery should be received at all or not. There were a series of three motions before the House, a motion to table, a motion to refuse to receive and a motion to reject. Polk said that the motion to refuse to receive was not in order, there was much wrangling and some confusion and Polk put the very motion he had declared out of order, the motion to refuse to receive***Bell had spoken in favor of allowing the motion to refuse to receive the petition lie over one

* Deb. Cong. XII-II p.1961. Dec. 16, 1835.

** Ibid XII-II p. ;987. Dec. -18, 1835& p.1997. Dec. 21, 1835.

*** Deb. Cong. XII-II 1968. Dec. 18, 1835.

day as it was a new proposition, then it could be rejected or laid on the table. He does not seem to get the idea that all this was helping to establish the precedent that the first thing to be done when a petition concerning slavery came up was to decide whether or not it should be received, a clear violation of the constitutional right of petition.

In May, 1836 the famous Pinckney resolutions were adopted by the House. The first resolution was to the effect that Congress had no right to interfere in any way with the institution of slavery in any of the states. Bell did not vote. * The second one stated that Congress ought not to interfere in any way with slavery in the District of Columbia. Bell voted in favor of this resolution. Evidently Bell was ready to commit himself as to what Congress ought to do, but not as to what Congress might do in regard to slavery. ** The third resolution was that all petitions etc. relating in any way to slavery should be laid on the table without being printed or referred to a committee. Bell failed to vote.*** It cannot be said that Bell was dodging the issue when he failed to vote, for not to vote was to commit himself in the minds of the southern men at this time.

* Deb. Cong. XII-IV p. 4052. May 26, 1836.

** Ibid. p. 4053.

*** Ibid. P. 4054.

Dec 20, 1837, Slade of Vermont, an extreme anti-slavery man, moved that a select committee be instructed to report a bill abolishing slavery and the slave trade in the District of Columbia. He extended his remarks to a great length, and finally began to discuss slavery in Virginia, for which he was called to order. A number of men from different southern states called upon their delegations to leave the hall. There was great excitement and yet for a time no one could think of any expedient for stopping Slade, altho a number tried to. A motion to adjourn was carried 106 to 63, according to the Congressional Globe. 105 to 64, according to the Journal of the House.* As soon as the adjournment was announced a member called out that all the southern delegations were then assembled in a committee room and called upon all men representing slavery interests to meet with them at once.

This affair made a great stir at the time and people feared that the southern men would leave Congress as they threatened to do. The "Past History" makes a great point of condemning Bell as one of three southern men who voted not to adjourn on the above occasion. The "Past History" quotes Benton as saying "this opposition to adjournment was one of the worst features of that unhappy day's work.**

* Cong. Globe. Dec. 20, 1837. p. 41. Journal of H. of R. Dec. 20, 1837. p. 125. ** Past History, p. 30.

The Journal of the House as referred to above, puts Bell's name in the list of those voting for adjournment and not against it. The Congressional Globe does not give the names. Note 1.

Jan. 9, 1837, Bell voted against the reception of a petition. John Quincy Adams had made one of his most exasperating attacks on slavery and insisted on reading a petition against slavery which was worded in a manner calculated to excite the greatest resentment in the minds of slave owners. Adams was so clever in bringing up precedents and in claiming freedom of speech that it looked as tho the only way to prevent his reading the offensive paper would be to throw him out bodily. They tried to drown him out by shouting but such was the quality of his voice that he could be distinctly heard above the uproar. Before the wrangle was over Adams had read the whole paper. On the motion to receive the petition Bell voted in the negative.* This is a departure from Bell's principle on the right of petition, perhaps due to the contumacy of Adams.

The "Past History" is again misleading in its statements concerning Bell's attitude on the Atherton "Gag" rule intro-
Note 1. The "Past History" is always very bitter against Bell but I have found its quotations and statements accurate heretofore.

* Deb. of Cong. XIII-I p. 1320. Jan. 9, 1837.

duced Dec. 11, 1838. Note 1. Bell voted with the majority for the introduction of the resolutions,* but asked for the unanimous consent of the House to allow the resolutions to lay over one day that they might be printed and the members vote intelligently on them. When that consent could not be obtained he moved to adjourn just as the previous question was about to be voted on to bring immediate action on the resolutions.** His motion failed and the previous question was put and carried, Bell voting against it. It was then decided to vote on the resolutions separately.

The first resolution was similar to the first Pinckney resolution that Bell had not voted on earlier,

First resolution. Congress has no jurisdiction over slavery in the states. Bell voted in the affirmative. *** There were but six votes in the negative.

Second resolution. The petitions against slavery etc. are part of a plan of operation to eventually destroy slavery in the states. This was carried 136 - 65, Bell voting in the affirmative.****

Third resolution. Congress has no right to do indirectly

Note 1. Atherton was a Democratic member from New Hampshire.

* Journal of the House Dec. 11, 1838 p.52.

** Ibid. p. 54.

*** Journal of the House of Reps. Dec 11, 1838 p.59.

**** Ibid Dec. 12, 1838, p.60.

what it cannot do directly. Carried, 170 to 30, Bell voting in the affirmative. * This is a curious vote since Congress was all the time doing the very thing it here declares it has no right to do.

Fourth resolution. That the agitation of the subject of slavery in the District of Columbia or the Territories with a view to overthrow that institution in the states was an infringement of the rights of the states. Carried 164 to 39, Bell voting in the affirmative. **

Fifth and sixth resolutions. That the states are equal in their rights and that Congress has no right to discriminate between the institutions of the different states with the view of abolishing some and promoting others. Both these were carried by large majorities, Bell voting in the affirmative. ***The last, that every petition etc. in any way relating to slavery shall be laid on the table without being printed, debated or referred. An attempt was made at this point to lay the last resolution on the table. Bell voted to do so but the motion was lost. The resolution was then put and carried 128 to 78, Bell voting against the resolution, all the other Tennessee delegates but one voting in the affirmative.**** Here we see Bell standing for slavery and states rights on every vote but

* Ibid. p. 62. Journal of H. of R. Dec. 11, 1838.

** Journal of H. of R. Dec. 11, 1838 p. 63.

*** Ibid. pp. 64, 66.

**** Journal of H. of R. Dec. 12, 1838 p. 70.

standing just as strongly for the constitutional right of petition as for the rights of the states.

Bell did not change his point of view nor his practice on the matter of petitions. In 1838 he proposed that all petitions concerning slavery be referred to the committee of the District of Columbia without debate. Adams reminded him that many of the petitions referred to slavery in the territories and to the slave trade between the states and should go to various committees. Bell replied that he had always thought that the petitions should be referred to a committee and hence his suggestion. It would seem that if all the southern men had taken Bell's advice, the abolition movement would not have gained any such headway as it did during this period, when thru the denial of the right of petition they made John Quincy Adams a champion of the anti-slavery movement. They gave abolition just the sort of advertising the movement needed to give it life.*

Just before the adoption of the "21st rule" against receiving petitions concerning slavery Bell told J. Q. Adams he could not vote for his motion to have all petitions on slavery brought to a vote before being rejected but said he was in favor of referring them to a committee. **

* See contrary opinion in speech of Butler of S. C. Cong. Globe. p.131. Jan 21, 1840. ** Cong. Globe p. 133. Jan. 21, 1840. J. Q. Adams Memoirs. X 199.

Jan. 28, 1840 W. Cost Johnson, a Whig from Maryland, moved that no petition concerning slavery be received or "entertained in any way whatever." The motion was passed and became the famous "21st rule," against which Adams waged relentless warfare. Bell voted against the motion.*

For all this standing for principle Bell was bitterly assailed. He was stigmatized as an abolitionist in the House by Turney, an administration man from Tennessee. ** Bell declared after two years experience that the abolitionists were making capital thru the fact that they could declare they were being refused the right of petition. He *** believed the Patton resolution against receiving petitions was made simply to strengthen the Democratic party in the south. They wanted the northern Whigs to vote against it so they could be called abolitionists and the southern Whigs likened to them and therefore he had opposed it. Bell is exceedingly tender about being called an ally of the abolitionists.****Here Bell does not stand quite four-square on the right of petition, claiming he supported the right in the interests of slavery, when heretofore he had stood for a constitutional principle. He was certainly right in his contention that the abolitionists profited

* Cong. Globe p. 150 - 151. Jan. 28, 1840.

** Ibid. appendix p. 357. May 31 and June 1, 1838.

*** Ibid. p. 45. Dec. 21, 1837.

**** Ibid. appendix p. 358. May 31, 1838.

through the refusal of the right of petition. Bell was assailed in Tennessee for his stand on the right of petition but defended his position and the people of the state upheld him.

Speaker of the House.

Andrew Stevenson of Virginia who had been Speaker of the House of Representatives for seven years, in 1834 resigned to receive the appointment of minister to Great Britain. We had had no minister at that court since 1832 when Van Buren's nomination for that place was rejected by the Senate on account of the political hostility of Clay, Webster and Calhoun, all members of the Senate. Their hostility continued, for Stevenson's nomination was rejected as well until 1836, when the majority in the Senate adverse to Jackson was overcome.¹ It is evident that the relations between Jackson and Bell were not cordial at this time. Peyton of Virginia went to Jackson and "disabused his mind" in regard to Bell. Polk was Jackson's candidate and he was evidently prejudiced against Bell. Peyton told Jackson that Bell was not electioneering for the Speakership while Polk was, and

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1. Williams' Statesman's Manual, p. 1017.

among the Nullifiers, at that.¹ (Note 1).

The nomination of Hugh L. White of Tennessee for the Presidency was already in the air. It was known that Bell favored White and that Jackson had determined that Van Buren should be his successor. Bell had not stayed by the party on the bank issue and when two Tennessee men came forward for the Speakership it presented an opportunity to the Whig minority not to be neglected. The "Past History" asserts that the Speakership was the price paid Bell for not defending Jackson's character in the bank war.² If Bell brought forward White for the Presidency against Van Buren the party might easily be split, there would be a Whig candidate, of course, and the election thrown into the House of Representatives where there would be an opportunity for the Whig minority to do some active work in practical politics. No proof was ever brought forward but Bell was taunted with it again and again as he swung over to the Whig party and he might well have remembered the wholesale onslaught he had made in 1826 on Adams

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1. Deb. Cong., XIII - II, p. 2129, March 2, 1837.

Note 1 - Hamer had said that Peyton urged Bell's election on the ground that he was a good party man and Peyton rejoined with the above statement.

2. Past History, p. 4.

and Clay for the alleged bargain.

There was no little planning or wire pulling going on before Bell's election. In 1833 the Tennessee legislature attempted to nominate White for the Presidency and Bell used his influence to prevent the nomination. Bell said he did it because he feared too early a nomination might injure White's prospects and because he was determined not to support White unless something more would come of it than dividing the party.¹

The Globe of April 13, 1835 quotes from a letter written by Bell in 1833 and C. P. White of New York in which Bell says concerning the Presidency, "As yet Tennessee has taken no active decided course in this question, but the sagacious politicians among us are going in for Van Buren!"² This, the Past History declares, was a bid for the support of the Van Buren men for the Speakership and declared that some Van Buren men voted for Bell while some of the White men voted against him.³

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1. Niles Register, 48:229, May 30, 1835. This was in a letter to the Editor of the Nashville Republican in reply to The Globe's charges against Bell.
2. Niles Register, 48:229, May 30, 1835.
3. Past History, p. 5.

Bell explains that he told the truth to C. P. White. The fall elections were not yet over and, in general, it was believed that the contest would be ^{between} Van Buren and a Whig candidate. The letter was one on private business, anyway, and it was warning enough to a New York, Van Buren politician, when he said that Tennessee had not yet taken a decided stand.¹ The Globe attack coming in April 1835, nearly a year after the election and describing events occurring nearly a year before the election and before Stevenson had resigned, seems very far-fetched and looks more like a frame-up after the event than anything else.

The voting for the Speakership was spirited and prolonged, and indicates no well-planned scheme on the part of either side. It required ten ballots to elect, and the result was altogether uncertain until the eighth vote was taken. In the first ballot Wilde of Georgia received 64 votes, Polk 42, Sutherland of Pennsylvania 34, and Bell 30. Both Polk and Bell gained steadily, Polk on nearly every ballot and Bell on every one. On the last ballot they stood, Bell 114, Polk 78, Wilde 11,

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1. Miles Register, 48:229, May 30, 1835.

scattering 9.¹ Bell's election was due to the Whigs and to White's and Bell's personal following in the Democratic party. To Jackson and Van Buren it was an act of sacrilege against party regularity and as such must be punished.

Elected to the chair by a minority plus a small personal following, standing as a believer in the principles of a hostile majority and planning to bring that majority to elect his candidate to the Presidency against the chosen candidate of Andrew Jackson, with nullification just past and its adherents his bitter enemies, and with the bank war still on, Bell surely had no easy task before him. He was still looked upon as a Democratic party man and so considered himself. He denied that he made any bargains with the opposition for his election and asserted that he did not believe that any member of the opposition expected concessions from him.²

In a speech in Congress in his own defense in 1839 he declared that he had been elected Speaker in direct opposition to Jackson, that the session was a

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1. Deb. Cong. X - IV, p. 4372, June 2, 1834.
2. Niles Register, 46:415, Letter to Crockett, Foster etc. in response to invitation, which he declined, to a public dinner in honor of Andrew Jackson at Nashville, July 30, 1834.

stormy one and that it was difficult to enforce the rules - yet no appeal was taken from his decisions and none reversed except one at his own request when he discovered he had made an error.¹ He received a unanimous vote of thanks at the close of his term, though John Quincy Adams joined in the vote only because Bell had to go through a closely contested election at home and he might be helped by the unanimous vote.² If Adams had understood himself as well as he usually did he would have known that his vote against Bell at this time would doubtless have helped him in Tennessee. Adams felt he had a personal grievance against Bell because Bell had made Adams chairman of the committee to settle the northern boundary of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois. Adams had been obliged to take the side against the states as a matter of justice but in so doing had incurred their bitter hostility. He cannot help suspecting Bell's motive in putting him on the committee.³ Possibly Bell thought that since Adams was so much hated

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1. Cong. Globe, Dec. 20, 1839, p. 69.

2. J. Q. Adams' Memoirs, IX, p. 214, March 4, 1835.

3. Ibid. X, 214.

and denounced already that he would bear the additional odium better than any one else. Adams adds that Bell is on the whole a good speaker and impartial as far as he dares be, though a strict party man and therefore occasionally timid.

Bell refrained from voting on the various bills for restoring the deposits although the votes were very close.¹ The bill for the repair of the Cumberland Road failed by one vote and Bell was called upon by a member to record his vote but refused to do so.² Notice has already been taken of Bell's assertion that he was influential in restraining the Committee on Ways and Means from reporting a resolution commending the removal of the deposits. Polk, by the way, by Bell's appointment, was chairman of the committee.

A few precedents of Parliamentary procedure of minor importance were established under Bell's Speakership. One of these was the origin of the practice of preventing the reconsideration of a motion by laying it on the table,³ and another was the recognition

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1. Deb. Cong. X - IV, p. 4468 & 9. 4467.

2. Adams' Memoirs, X, 150.

3. Hinds, Precedents of the House of Representatives, V, Sec. 5634.

of the practice of holding the session of the House after midnight of the third of March closing a session.¹ An attempt was made to bring in the reading of a report after the previous question was ordered but the precedent was established by Bell that it would be in the nature of debate and therefore not allowable.²

Bell served as speaker during the remainder of the session of 1834 which lasted into July and remained in the chair through the short session of 1834-5. He was candidate for Speaker again in December 1835. Bell had been alive to the situation and doing some correspondence to bring about his election. In a letter to Charles Cassidy he says that Polk is bent on defeating him for re-election and yet suggests that it may be possible to get Polk not to vote for any candidate except himself against Bell since Bell had thrown aside personal feelings earlier and made Polk chairman of the Ways and Means Committee.³ This letter is the last indication of any hope on the part of Bell of staying with Jackson and Polk in any political undertaking. Within a few days

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1. Hinds, Precedents of the House of Representatives, V, Sec. 5695.
2. Ibid. V, Sec. 5294.
3. Past History, p. 5, May 11, 1835.

he had entered an open war against Jackson and Polk and political war in Tennessee meant all that the name suggested to General Sherman. The Jacksonian system had reached the height of its power in 1835 and Polk was elected Speaker on the first ballot. Polk receiving 132 votes, Bell 84, scattering 9.¹ At the opening of the Twenty-fifth Congress, which met in special session in September, 1837 at the call of Van Buren, the power of the Democratic party was not so evident. There was some sharp skirmishing before the vote for Speaker in regard to the qualifications of the Mississippi delegation and the trend of the debate indicates that the participants had an eye on the effect the result would have on the Speakership. Polk was elected again on the first ballot receiving 116 votes, Bell 103, scattering 5.² A majority of eight votes must have seemed a rather precarious one to Polk, after the 48 majority he had in the previous Congress.

The Twenty-sixth Congress met December 2, 1839, but was not able to vote for a Speaker until December 14.

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1. Deb. Cong. XII - II, 1945, Dec. 7, 1835.
2. Ibid., XIV - I, p. 566, Sept. 4, 1837.

The whole New Jersey delegation was contested and the decision on these contests would decide the Speakership and the majority in the House. This is one of the critical points in the history of the House of Representatives. In the midst of great excitement and anxiety the House turned to John Quincy Adams as belonging to no party and with a reputation for honesty, and made him temporary chairman.¹ When the membership was finally determined upon, the voting for Speaker began. For the first time the vote for Speaker was taken by yeas and nays in response to the roll call. On the first ballot, John W. Jones of Virginia received 113 votes, Bell 102, W. C. Dawson of Georgia 11, scattering 9. Bell voted for Dawson. On the second ballot, Jones received 113, Bell 99, Dawson 11, scattering 12. On the third ballot, the Bell forces all swung to Dawson, giving him 103, to Jones 110. The Democrats were the only ones who could hang together. The Whigs split into several groups. Bells votes run as follows:

1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th
102	99	1	2	22	21	64	80	33	12	0

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1. Congressional Globe, p.20, Dec. 5, 1839.

The Jones' vote went to pieces on the seventh ballot and R. M. T. Hunter of Virginia, a Democrat, was elected Speaker on the eleventh ballot, Bell and Adams voting for him.¹ This ends John Bell's ambitions in the matter of the Speakership.

Bell Against Jackson.

The most significant part of Bell's career at this period is his separation from Jackson and his eventual adhesion to the Whig party. He was a thorough Democrat, as he understood that term when he entered Congress in 1827, he was not a man to swing from one point of view to another easily and in fact we shall find him contending with all his power that he had not changed but that the party had. He still claims to be a thorough states rights man when he is the acknowledged leader of the Whig party in the House.

Bell never was entirely in harmony with Jackson, personally, as has been referred to, Bell belonged to Jackson's Congressional District and Jackson openly championed Felix Grundy in opposition to Bell in his

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1. Cong. Globe, VIII, pp. 83, 84, 85, 86, Dec. 14 and 16, 1839.

first campaign for Congress. To oppose any man whom Jackson favored was something that could never be overlooked by a man of Andrew Jackson's temperment and training. In 1831 White, who had long been a leading man in Tennessee, strongly recommended Bell for a position in the cabinet but Jackson did not make much response.¹ At that time Bell had distinguished himself as champion of Jackson on the internal improvement question, and had strongly seconded him on his Indian removal policy. In 1832 Bell greatly offended Jackson by not coming completely over to him on the Bank War. It was evident to a less astute politician than Jackson that here was a man who would never make a well-drilled, obedient follower in the military, political machine that Jackson was building up.

The second step in Bell's departure from Jackson was his election to the Speakership above described. Polk was Jackson's candidate and party unity was at stake. The final step was Bell's advocacy of White as successor to Jackson, himself, Van Buren

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1. Letter of White to Van Vaulx, 1836. Past Hist.p.5..

being Jackson's choice as was well known. Jackson had been on the outlook for the White movement for some time. He announced that no member of his cabinet should be a candidate for President and soon Van Buren retired from the cabinet to receive the appointment as Minister to Great Britain that the Senate refused to confirm. Soon after, Jackson offered White a seat in the cabinet and when he refused that, offered him a position/^{on} the Supreme Bench.¹ In 1834 Jackson threatened that if White became a candidate he would render him odious to society,² and just before starting for Tennessee for the campaign of 1835 he said he was going to feast on John Bell and Hugh White that summer.³

The first decided step towards the nomination of White was taken at a meeting of the Tennessee delegation in Congress at Washington, December 19, 1834, when Bell was Speaker. Bell hesitated for a time about attending the meeting, not being sure that it would be becoming in the Speaker to do so.⁴ All but

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1. Phelan's History of Tennessee, p. 365.
2. Ibid., p. 366.
3. Scott, Memoirs of White, 325.
4. Niles, 48:229. May 30, 1835, - Letter of Bell's in reply to Globe charges.

three representatives attended the meeting and one senator. Polk was not on speaking terms with Bell and refused to come. Grundy was also absent. It was reported at the meeting that they both would stand by White.¹ Bell said later that the delegation was unanimous for White and very frank and outspoken in the matter. On the next day the rest of the delegation were surprised when the two men who called the meeting with one other came out against White. One of these was Grundy.²

In a letter to William Blount, May 10th, 1835 Jackson called Bell a Whig and declared that White was politically lost unless he turned from Bell at once. He said that the Baltimore convention would consider White's claim if he would cut entirely away from the Opposition, implying that White was going over to the Whigs too.³ A few days after this (May 23, 1835) Bell was given a public dinner at Nashville. According to the custom of the times a number of toasts were given

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1. Scott, Memoirs of White, p. 261.
2. Phelan, Hist. of Tenn. p. 366.
3. Deb. Cong. XII - IV, p. 4401, June 23, 1836.
3. Past History, p. 8.

indicative of the thought of the occasion. Most of them were against caucuses and conventions as against the right of the people to choose their own candidates. These men fully realized that they must not seem to oppose Jackson nor did they wish to, apparently, though of course, Bell knew that there never could be peace between him and the great leader. Some of the toasts are worth giving, "The people of Tennessee - They will never submit to dictation, however dear the dictator". Jacob S. Yergar offered one that is impressive, if not elegant. "The Globe - The political skunk of 1835 - better let the puny animal pass, than, by crushing it, to be suffocated by its stench."¹

However much the Globe may have deserved the name, it was anything but puny as Bell and his followers were to learn.

The great event of the evening was, of course, Bell's address. He paid tribute to Jackson as a loyal Tennesseean should, acknowledged the necessity of party organization but put great emphasis upon the danger of

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1. Niles Register, 49:263 & 4, June 13, 1835.

party fanaticism. He had the courage to tell a Tennessee audience that the Bank was constitutional and no menace to the country unless through party action it was forced to become political. He gave a merciless analysis of the Jackson-VanBuren machine, declaring that a cardinal principle was absolute obedience and renunciation of individual opinion in every member who hoped to rise, while the chief article of faith was belief in the infallibility of the chief. An impassioned declaration to the directors of the party that they would find men who knew their own minds and would act accordingly, was interrupted again and again by applause. Because the Tennessee delegation had met to talk over the candidacy of Judge White, they had been called nullifiers and conspirators. He declared the White men were as true Democrats as ever and that whether Van Buren or White won the election there would be no division of the party and that the Fathers of Democracy who feared a split in the party might dry their tears.

The party had never been united, anyway, on any of the great questions that had arisen during Jackson's administration. The Tariff, Internal Improvements, States

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Rights, Indian Claims, and the Bank had all found divisions of the party on opposite sides and no two questions brought the same divisions. Without the nullifiers the Indian policy could not have been carried out. Many of the party were for a high tariff and they were divided on the Internal Improvement question. The majority of the party was in favor of re-chartering the Bank, and yet that question had brought more unity than any other during the administration, due to Jackson's violent antagonism to the Bank. Men had to get on one side or the other. The only unity the party had ever really known was "the support of General Jackson and the preservation of power." The real trouble lies in "the presumptions, intrusion of the undisciplined militia of the party into a matter with which it is said they ought to have nothing to do, except to give their sanction when called upon for that purpose, according to party usage".¹ There is enough material in this address to form the basis of two good class-room lectures on the kaleidoscopic changes and political incongruities of Jackson's administration.

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1. Niles Register, 48:330, July 11, 1835. Taken from the Nashville Banner.

From this time on, Bell is called a Whig and no one could hope that he ever would or could return to his personal allegiance to the Jackson party.

This challenge on the part of Bell was taken up at once by the Globe which preferred charges against Bell that were so coarse that Niles said he would not print them but leave them to be inferred from Bell's reply which was printed in full. Niles says that the only real charge against Bell is the fact that he preferred White to Van Buren for the next President. He adds that Bell is contending against fearful odds as the affiliated press will not publish Bell's defense although publishing the charges in a thousand different forms.¹ These charges dealt largely with alleged bargains Bell had made for the Speakership and his dealings with the Bank which had already been discussed.

The old slogan of caucus intrigue that worked so well against Adams and Clay is caught up again by both parties. Bell says the Baltimore convention that

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1. Niles Register, 48:217, May 30, 1835. Editorial.

nominated Van Buren is nothing but the "exploded artifice of a caucus" devised to give the party of executive patronage a chance of success. He declares that the thing the Van Buren men are a unit on is a desire for the spoils of office,¹ while the *Globe* says White was nominated by "the odious agency of a caucus composed of a few members of Congress acting upon usurped authority."² Jackson wrote letters to campaign speakers in Tennessee denouncing White and Bell, and these letters were read from the stump throughout the campaign.³ He also provided numberless copies of the *Globe* to be used for the same purpose.⁴

The hope of the Jackson men in the state election was to defeat Bell for re-election to the House and elect a state legislature that would refuse to elect White to the Senate. They failed in every particular. Jackson could not alter the sentiment for White nor make the people believe that the contest was between

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1. Niles, 49:117. From a letter of Bell's published in the *Columbia (Tennessee) Observer*, Sept. 15, 1835.
2. Niles, 48:229.
3. Deb. Cong. XII-IV, p. 4405, June 23, 1836.
4. Deb. Cong. XII-III, p. 2854.

him and White. They knew it was between Van Buren and White and could not be deceived. Even Polk, who was, next to Jackson, Bell's bitterest enemy dared not assume Jackson's attitude when before the people. He declared in the campaign that his individual preference was for White and criticised the Baltimore convention.¹ On the other hand, Bell could not say enough in praise of the great principles Jackson stood for, he declared he had voted for all his measures and said that "the friends of Judge White will adhere to General Jackson and his administration from consistency and respect for their own characters, and because they will be supporting their own principles."² It would be difficult to imagine a more complicated political situation. Neither side dared express its true feelings except when Bell gets launched against Van Buren's schemes and then he expresses his earnest conviction, or when Polk tries to describe the base treachery of Bell.

The White men carried the state, gained full control of the organization and proceeded to elect a senator.

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1. Phelan, History of Tenn., p. 370.
2. Niles Register, 48:330, Speech of May 23, 1835.

On the second day of the session each member received a copy of the Globe, franked by Jackson and containing a furious onslaught on Judge White for his course against the Expunging Resolution. On the same day White was elected Senator by an almost unanimous vote. On October 17, 1835 he was nominated for President by a vote of 60 to 12.¹ As for Bell, he had no opponent in the election. There was much running to and fro and many promises made to get a man to enter the contest against him, but no one came forward.² In the election for President Tennessee went for White almost two to one. Jackson's county went for White by a majority of 344 and even The Hermitage went 61 to 20 for White.³

Bell Leads the Opposition.

From now on it is war, open and undisguised. The situation is recognized by every one and in spite of Bell's pride in his States Rights principles, and in his Democratic belief, he cannot help being looked upon as a

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1. Phalan, Hist. of Tenn. p. 370.
2. Ibid., p. 370.
3. Niles Register, 51:196.

Whig, being called a Whig, and soon he is a Whig. His personal relations with Jackson had never been close and for a Democrat of a new school, that was the first consideration. Bell's statement that he had never been sheltered under "the paternal wing of the President" (Jackson) or "I never was a dependent or hanger on of that distinguished man" was a very mild way of putting it. The ordinary mind grasps what he meant more clearly when he said "In every contest in which I have been concerned, whether before the people or this House, I have ever found the President (Jackson) my most powerful opponent".¹ Bell placed his opposition to Jackson on political grounds only, but that the Democrats would not allow. The Jackson men of that day, and least of all Jackson, could not see the difference between personal abuse and condemnation of public action. When Bell calls the acts of Jackson arbitrary and despotic they accuse him of calling Jackson a "tyrant", "usurper", a "crouching sycophant", a "degraded slave"; a strange jumble of contradictory phrases, ridiculous in them-

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1. Deb. Cong. X-IV, p. 4402, June 23, 1836.

selves were they not to be used to delude the people and turn them against Bell.¹ This idea of personal loyalty was essentially a western idea and was an asset always used in that section. That makes Bell's successful fight in Tennessee all the more significant for Tennessee looked upon Jackson as her great hero.

Bell always contended that his principles had never changed, but if so, he had partially suppressed them in the earlier years of Jackson's administration for not he attacks it at every turn. The bill for appropriating money for the navy yards offered the opportunity for the first of these assaults. He began by moving to reduce the amount for the Portsmouth Navy Yard one-half.² His opposition to the bill is merely nominal although he stops to suggest that the country would be better off with fewer navy yards, better equipped, and suggests that the great number (seven) are useful only to afford patronage to the government. The report of the experts of the navy was against so many yards on

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1. Congressional Globe, May 31, 1838, App. p. 558.

Reference by Bell to former charges.

2. Cong. Debate, XII-IV, p. 4402, June 23, 1836.

the grounds both of economy and efficiency, but then, Bell said, nothing but contempt is expressed by the Republican majority for economy.¹ The attack on the naval service bill was merely the excuse, however, for a general overhauling of the administration. Bell gave warning that he proposed to free his mind pretty generally and that he intended "to indulge the privilege of debate to the utmost limit of Parliamentary license."²

His first grievance is due to the manner in which the majority are cutting off debate and railroading the general appropriation bill through the House. Mason had secured the adoption of a rule that the appropriation bill should become the order of the day each day at one o'clock. In practice the majority allowed discussion on minor matters, but as soon as there seemed to be any danger that the motives of the majority might be exposed, debate was at once shut off. To Bell the majority was acting in the exact spirit of the Sedition Law of 1798. Discussion is stopped, a large army and navy demanded and a war scare is used as the excuse. The

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1. Deb. Cong., XII-III, p. 3218, April 7, 1836.
2. Ibid., XII-III, p. 2817, March 16, 1836.

Jackson party has taken up all these dangerous principles of the old Federalists, yet it is all done in the name of Democracy and Liberty.¹ There can be no better way to enlighten the people as to the needs and affairs of the government than by free, open, and manly discussion of all the great issues on the floor of the House. At the present time but one side can be heard. Bell asserts that the Senate had become the popular branch of Congress for there the members had the right to discuss freely whatever important measure was before the country. "Sir", he said, "Free discussion exists no longer on this floor"!

In February, Bell had complained that the House had tied itself down so closely by rules that it was impossible to take up a fundamental principle of government in a distinct and separate form. He thought to test the spirit of fairness of debate by moving that Calhoun's bill from the Senate repealing the section of the Tenure of Office Act of 1820 limiting the terms of Federal Officers to four years, be referred to a select committee so that even if the majority of the committee were adverse to the bill, the minority

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1. Deb. Cong., XIII-III, p. 2821, Mar. 16, 1836.

might express their views, at least. Vanderpoel of New York intimated that the House was getting tired of being lectured by Bell about the enormity of the rules and thought he could be content without the special committee. The motion was not given much consideration.¹ The majority is likely to be well enough satisfied with rules they can manipulate to bring about their own ends, but this was the Republican party that prided itself on freedom of discussion. There was another set-to on the freedom of debate February 25th. Bell complained that the rules prevented discussion and Mann of New York remarked that he was sorry the rules gave Bell so much affliction, which speech, Bell characterized as "impertinent".² A more serious protest arises over debates following the introduction of resolutions. For the first time in our history a member introducing a resolution must waive all debate unless he could gain the consent of two-thirds of the House. It had always been a standing rule that the roll of the states should be called for resolutions with the privilege of discussion. Bell finds the terms

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1. Deb. Cong. XII-II, p. 2470, Feb. 3, 1836.
2. Ibid., XII-II, p. 2632, Feb. 25, 1836.

too humiliating to allow him to introduce the many resolutions he had against dangerous practices of the government.¹ Bell makes many complaints against this two-thirds rule, which certainly was a sudden tightening of the reins of power by the majority. By 1840 Bell was forced to beg the leave of the House even to introduce a bill on the freedom of elections. Its introduction was fiercely objected to and finally allowed thru the courtesy of some of the more liberal members of the majority.² These protests of Bell are interesting as marking the beginning of that rigorous restriction of debate and iron-clad system of rules that finally came to a head under the regime of Speaker Cannon. Democracy knows no measure too harsh for the man who would get in its way, and certainly a majority must be able to protect itself against such untiring and capable objectors as Bell, else no legislation could be carried through. The nice line that divides party responsibility for legislation from the right of the minority to represent its views with fairness to both divisions may not be hit upon at once by a new democracy finding itself

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1. Deb. of Cong., XII-IV, p. 4663, April 12, 1836.
2. Cong. Globe, April 1, 1840, App. p. 829.

in power for the first time and just realizing its great strength.

There is nothing too great or too small to draw Bell's fire during this period, from Jackson and the party leaders to the previous question. The Whigs were quite inclined to sit back and enjoy the spectacle of a fight between the men who had so completely dominated them and saw in the struggle great advantages to themselves. Nothing could be more sure than that they had a great ally in Bell. He found great fault with the commission or "embassy", as he called it, that Jackson sent up to Michigan and Ohio to mediate between them when they were so near to a war over the boundary question. If the President could appoint such a commission without consulting any one, endow them with power limited only by his personal instruction and pay them from the United States Treasury on his own order, what was there to prevent his filling the whole country with his appointees and govern at his own discretion? Bell cites the nullification difficulty as one far more serious than the Michigan-Ohio controversy and yet Congress did not authorize any such embassy. The sending of special

envoys and the wholesale advertising they were given in the journals magnified the affair and made it more difficult of settlement.¹ It may very well be that Bell underestimated the critical nature of the clash between Michigan and Ohio. The people in both states were highly excited and determined, they were typically western in their characteristics, and they both had armed men in the field. The rash action of any one, hot headed westerner who had imbibed a little too much frontier whiskey, might at any moment precipitate a real war, and perhaps it required a commission directly representative of Jackson to make the leaders stop to consider the consequences of their activities. The opposition is very likely to look with over sensitive eyes at the use of any unusual power in the hands of a triumphant majority.²

Opposition to the Baltimore Convention.

It is Bell's constant assertion that he has remained the same but that the party has changed. He has not left the party but the party has left him. One of the principles of the party was opposition to the Congressional

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1. Deb. Cong., XII-IV, p.4663, April 12, 1836.
2. Other attacks by Bell on the authority of Jackson are too closely connected with other topics to be treated separately.

caucus which the people thought had been abused by Crawford in 1824. They had held that the caucus prevented the free and independent choice of the people, it gave the small states an equal voice in the election of President when it threw the election into the House, and was a constant source of intrigue and corruption in Congress.¹ The great rallying cry of the party had been that the people had been cheated out of their rights and that the selection of the President must be taken out of the hands of the politicians and given back to the people. From Bell's point of view the Baltimore Convention that nominated Van Buren contained all the bad features of the Congressional caucus, with its pretended delegates from the people.²

This severe attack brought Towns of Georgia out in reply. He says Crawford's use of the caucus was objected to because he used a minority of the Republican party to bring about his nomination against the wishes

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1. It is certain that the caucus operated more than anything else to prevent the election going to the House. By any other system then in use the states were almost certain to nominate favorite sons and through the number of candidates prevent any one of them from securing a majority vote.

2. Deb. Cong., XII-III, p.2827, March 21, 1836.

of the majority.¹ The Republicans had no fundamental objection to a caucus in itself, if it represented the majority. If Bell was so much against the caucus why had he secured the nomination of White by means of the caucus of the Tennessee delegation? Bell had tried to explain away that affair by saying that there was no regular notice given, no chairman and no secretary, because no minutes were kept.² Towns said this meeting possessed all the bad features of a caucus but none of the good ones. "Secret, private, political meetings, without record of their proceedings, is the political class of assemblies most ^{to be} dreaded in this country." Bell's charge against the Baltimore convention can frighten no one. "The right of the people to be heard in convention is sacred." When the people choose representatives to voice their sentiment in convention, they cannot be frightened into fear of losing their liberty.³

Bell counters Towns' return blows by showing how

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1. Towns is putting it in this form because Bell is urging White's candidacy from a minority nomination.
2. Bell had made this explanation to Garland of Virginia.
3. Deb. Cong., XII-III, p.3672, May 11, 1836.

the party leaders settle all the principal matters before the conventions meet; he asserts that the primary assemblies are called last, rather than first, to determine the will of the people.¹ As to the meeting of the Tennessee delegation, it bore no resemblance to a caucus or a convention. No nomination was made nor intended. The letter that was written later by some of the Tennessee men urging White's name for President was not spoken of at the meeting.² Bell has to answer for this meeting at Washington many times and the more he explained the less effect his explanations had. The clever schemers who handled Jackson's political fortunes knew well enough the telling effect of a charge persisted in, and the fact that the delegation met, that Bell was there, and that it met for the purpose of naming a candidate made it easy to call the affair a caucus. If a dozen men could not meet informally and discuss the fortunes of a man of their own state it would be a curious situation indeed.

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1. Deb. Cong. XII-IV, p. 4410.
2. Ibid., XII-IV, p. 4401. June 23, 1836.

At the time Bell did not seem to be quite prepared to meet Towns' retort in the most convincing manner but he was not to be overthrown by mere assertion and insinuation when there was so much material for reply at hand and he prepared himself to show what the boasted peoples' convention at Baltimore was really like. His account of the make-up of the Columbus, Ohio Convention to nominate delegates to the Baltimore Convention is worth recording. He says that there were present as delegates, thirteen postmasters, three registers and receivers, two lighthousekeepers, two superintendents of the National Road, one collector of customs, one inspector, one bearer of foreign dispatches, one commissioner under the Treaty with Naples, and four printers of United States laws, besides numerous state officers. He also enumerates the federal officers who attended the Albany convention.¹ It is interesting to read the fine scorn with which Bell holds this up as a sample of the "sacred right of convention" and expression of "the will of the people".²

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1. Deb. Cong., XIII-I, p. 1467, Jan. 25, 1837.
2. Bell speaks in great scorn of these conventions of pretended delegates from the people. He may have had in mind but did not mention it (perhaps he mentioned it but it was not reported, the reporters of that day did not pretend to report speeches in full but used their discretion about what they would leave out) a famous case of misrepresentation

It is/^a little difficult now to get the point of view of these men who were so opposed to the national convention idea. The earlier presidential succession had been fostered by the Congressional caucus until it seemed to the West that the voice of the people had been completely obscured and that designing politicians of the aristocratic type were manipulating the national government to suit their own interests. The old type of Democracy represented by the Jefferson school was no longer satisfactory. That had never been a real democracy but gladly looked to the governing class for its inspiration and leadership. Now the West was coming into power and it was determined that the real people, the common people who worked the farms and managed the country stores and the interior newspapers, should direct the affairs of the national government as they saw fit and in their own interest. They had not as yet come to understand that if the people were to manage the government

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at the Baltimore Convention. Tennessee had sent no delegates to the convention being bent on the election of White. A certain man named Rucker was present from Tennessee and there being nothing to hinder him, cast fifteen votes for Tennessee. His votes secured the nomination of Col. R. M. Johnson for Vice President. For a long time afterwards any irregularity of this sort was dubbed "Ruckerism".¹

1. Scott, Memoirs of Hugh L. White, p. 335.

that the people must be organized and accept leadership, that unless they did organize and hold to the organization that the people would be divided among themselves and government would become confusion. The New York politicians had long since worked out a complete scheme of organization which enabled them to manage the people and direct their political strength to the place where it might be used effectively. One part of their new plan was the convention system whereby all the forces of the party might be concentrated on one set of candidates. Honestly used, the convention system is an ideal one for the expression of political forces, if not of the will of the people. Dishonestly used, there can hardly be anything worse. It is not necessary to recount the history of jobbery and corruption that has followed the convention system. On the other hand, unless the people found some other form of organization just as effective there was nothing more certain than that they must either go back to the old governing class idea and develop a leisure class to handle the affairs of the country or else all would fall into confusion through lack of organization, and political despots take the place of consti-

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tutional government. Bell and his followers came to see this in time, for they no sooner found the power in their own hands than the problem of how to use it and marshall their forces became as vital to them as it had been to Jackson and Van Buren and they were forced to adopt the same methods. The spoils system offers much the same problem in a more exaggerated form and the results were the same as in the case of the convention system.

Amendment of the Constitution.

As a corrolary to the opposition to the convention system, the Jackson men had insisted that the constitution should be amended to give the election back into the hands of the people. To this end Jackson had recommended amending the constitution, but his proposals were evidently a mere matter of form.¹ The bill from the Senate proposing amendments to this effect had been contemptuously laid aside and never referred to again. Regularly at the beginning of each session a committee had been appointed to recommend

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1. Deb. Cong., XII-III, p. 2817, Mar. 21, 1836.

amendments but that committee never reported. It was evident that the party never intended that it should report, every other measure that the administration wished to put through had been taken up without difficulty.¹ Bell asserted that every move in Congress is dominated by the question of who shall be elected the next President. The election of the Speaker (Polk over Bell) was heralded as a triumph of the Van Buren party.² The real reason why the recommendations of Jackson had been disregarded was because the party had no idea that the people should choose the President but intended to choose him through the medium of the edicts convention system.³ Nothing can be said about this, of course, except that Bell was right and the majority had changed its mind. Nothing can be more certain than that it is bound to do that. I believe that it is Schouler who says some place that consistency can never be the crown jewel of a political party that hopes to maintain the ascendancy. The party saw plainly enough that the nomination of the candidates must rest in the hands of the leaders if victory was to be assured.

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1. Deb. Cong., XII-III, p. 2856, March 21, 1836.

2. Ibid., XII-III, p. 2822, March 21, 1836.

3. Ibid., p. 2856.

Bell's onslaught on the party as a party of no principles at all but that it was made up of the most diverse elements imaginable, which had already been foreshadowed but which he is to work out in far greater detail later, was, if he had only known it, the very reason why this party of the people must be organized or drop to pieces of its own weight.

The Presidential Succession.

Another principle of the party from which it had digressed was that the greater officers of the government must not be elected President. This had sprung from the earlier Presidential succession which had seemed to make the office of Secretary of State the regular stepping stone to the Presidency. There had been no well-founded objection to this. If the office of Secretary of State is the best training school for the Presidency and the man selected proves himself the best qualified for the office and as President carries out the duties of the office in a high-minded and capable manner and in harmony with the desire of the nation, what fault can be found with it? Certainly

the Presidents chosen under that regime were among the strong ones in our history and the thing that the people feared most of all from that system, corruption, is the very last thing with which they can be charged. I believe that the men who were piloting the fortunes of the new party saw and understood this as well as it can be understood today but used the prejudices of the people of the West to further their own particular ends. Van Buren was openly championed by the President for the succession. He was first Secretary of State, then sent as minister to England during the recess of Congress that the Senate might be induced to accept him when they met and discovered that he was already acting as Minister, but without avail, for he had to come home, then he was brought in as Vice President and now all the forces of the party were concentrated on making him the next President.¹

Expenditures and Executive Patronage.

The retrenchment of expenditures and the limitation of executive patronage were the perpetual themes of the

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1. Deb. Cong. XII-III, p. 2828, March 21, 1836.

Jackson party as first constituted. Bell charged that instead of decreasing the expenditures they have been increased many times over, and that, too, where there was little need and often without the warrant of law, especially in the matter of appointing useless officers. The direct result of this extravagance will soon be increased taxation. Soon the public lands will not yield more than \$1,000,000.00 a year and then new taxes must be levied. Bell even charges that the administration is favoring heavy expenditures in order that there will be an excuse for the renewal of the protective tariff principle, since the strongest men in the party are from New York and Pennsylvania and those sections stand for protection. Cambreleng, chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, (a New York man) has said openly that we should have a navy equal to that of any power in the world. That will mean fifteen or twenty thousand men in the army and at least one hundred ships. Bell thinks he sees a preconceived effort to bring about these enormous expenditures through using the war scare with France to force a vote. He read a selection from the President's message calling on Congress to put the

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country where it could not be taken by surprise.¹ Bell charges that all this war talk with France is merely for the sake of forcing men into voting money that may be used for executive patronage. The government journals had been spreading the alarm industriously and Cambreleng had indirectly charged that any man who did not vote the appropriation bills without question was an enemy of this country.²

Bell goes back to the failure of the three million appropriation bill of the last session to show that all the administration men had in mind was political manipulation. At that time the House had passed a bill appropriating three millions for the army, navy and fortifications. The Senate refused the amount to one million seven hundred thousand dollars, and the word was passed about the House that it would be better to let the bill fail and throw the responsibility on the Senate. A conference committee was appointed and it was agreed that eight hundred thousand dollars be added. This would make the bill two million five hundred thousand dollars. At that time it became known that White of the Senate had

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1. Deb. Cong., XII-III, p. 2823, March 16, 1836.
2. Ibid., XII-III, p. 2835, March 21, 1836.

voted against the bill and when the conference committee reported, there was not a quorum to transact business. It was already after twelve o'clock on the third of March, the closing hours of Bell's Speakership, and the end of the Congress. Bell read the names of the men who were absent and of these, fifty-two were administration men and only nine were of the opposition. Of these fifty-two a large number voted twice afterwards that same night. Bell knew they were present all the time. Cambreleng had been made chairman of the Conference Committee after he had said he was in favor of letting the bill fail and when he appeared he would not report because there was no quorum present. Bell knew there was a quorum present, although not answering to the roll call and he asserted that Cambreleng knew it, too. The Cumberland road bill was passed after twelve o'clock because that was a party measure, then suddenly it became evident that the regular whippers in had become the whippers out and a quorum could not be secured. Straightway the whole administration party raised the cry that the Senate had defeated an absolutely necessary appropriation bill in the face of imminent peril of war.

The Globe came out with a lurid story of how the Senate had defeated the bill and especially that White was responsible, that he was guilty of treasonable conduct, that he had played the part of Benedict Arnold and had betrayed our fortifications to the enemy. That number of the Globe was sent by the President (Jackson) under his own frank to every member of the Tennessee legislature, at that time considering White for Tennessee's candidate for the Presidency.¹ All this would indicate that filibustering is not a recent development and that the honesty of Andrew Jackson was not of such a character as to interfere too much with his political methods. Of sixty-one men who voted on the Cumberland Road bill and refused to vote on the appropriation bill, Bell says fifty-two were Van Buren men and working actively for him for President and they were the same men who had been devoting their time to convincing the people that there was going to be a war. They gave as their excuse for not voting for the appropriation bill that they were deterred by conscientious scruples from voting a

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1. Deb. Cong., XII-III, p.1836, March 21, 1836.

measure after twelve o'clock on the third of March. Bell pins the matter down very closely. He says that if there was no danger of war they were fakirs, if there was danger they should have voted the money even if there existed a doubt in their minds as to the constitutionality of it, their scruples did not seem to bother them in the matter of the Cumberland Road bill. They said that Jackson would not sign a bill passed after twelve o'clock, but Bell suggested that if there was any real danger of war there would be no question but that Jackson would do his part. "It is strange", Bell said, "that a whole party that claims exclusive patriotism should have been paralyzed by doubts at such a moment."¹

Bell continued to press home his charges of creating a war scare for political purposes in the most relentless manner. His speech runs through three days and he surely went to the extreme verge of Parliamentary license as he announced he would. Vanderpoel of New York undertook to answer Bell but did it in the most perfunctory way as though it did not make much

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1. Deb. Cong., XII-III, p. 1836, March 21, 1836.

difference. He says that the people can't be frightened any more with the cry of executive patronage, if Bell knew matters were so bad, why did he wait so long before he exposed the terrible state of affairs.¹ Certainly a man is in a difficult position when he undertakes to reform a party with whom he has been acting, and Bell's enemies were very adroit in pushing him into difficulties which drew from him a formal answer later. Cambreleng also answered Bell but confused the issue and satisfied himself as did Vanderpoel by saying that Bell was a party too much that he had charged the Republicans with doing, which would not seem to free them from blame if they were wrong and they still continued to do the same things, but it would have a certain effect on the public mind.²

Bell makes his final assault on this particular matter by making a calendar of the way the House spent its time after the emergency bill was introduced to provide for the expected and imminent (?) war with France.. Cambreleng had introduced the bill and urged

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1. Deb. Cong., XII-III, p. 3153, April 6, 1836.
2. Ibid., XII-III, p. 3376, April 27, 1836.

that Congress act at once, no estimates were in but he would take all the responsibility for immediate action. The next day Cambreleng moved to take up the bill for the relief of the New York fire sufferers. Two-thirds of the House agreed, then came small affairs for about a week, then a resolution of J. Q. Adams' for five days, then indifferent matters until February 9th, nearly a month, then on Cambreleng's motion election contests were taken up. From January 13th to April 6th, only fourteen days had been taken up in considering the appropriation bill and even then the debate never began until one o'clock P. M. Bell says that the reason why he has held on so long and insisted on debate is because he wanted the country to know what was being planned and to give the people time to influence Congress. He says that it was definitely proposed in the Senate to use up all the surplus revenue in national defense and that an extravagant bill had been introduced in the House for military aggrandizement. Since Bell had held the matter up and forced an open debate the influence of the people was already beginning to react on the members of Congress. The Secretary of War had proposed a commission to examine and determine as to how much

was really needed for fortifications, just the sort of a commission that Bell had proposed for the navy yards.¹ The surplus revenue had become a serious problem. The President was bent on using it for military defense and the opposition had brought forward the scheme of distributing it among the states. It occurred to no one that the money need not be spent out of hand, the one idea is to get rid of it. Bell is anxious for distribution, a position that does little credit to his statesmanship, but it may be he was actuated to take that position by the fact that that was the only scheme that the opposition could unite on and it is certain that he feared that the money that would be expended in fortifications and ships would be squandered by incompetent spoilsmen and would serve no better purpose than to increase the patronage of the Jackson party.

In Bell's mind the relation between the appropriations for the national defense continued to be largely a question of patronage. In 1839 he returned to the attack with much of the same point of view. Cary of Michigan,

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1. Deb. Cong., XII-III, p. 3381, April 27, 1836.

a member of the administration party, made a sweeping attack on the condition of the navy, saying that at the time of the war scare with France, that although the difficulty ran through nearly three years that the United States had but one warship and two small vessels fit for immediate service.¹ The discussion arose under the appropriation bill for the civil and diplomatic service and fearing/^{what} he wished to say might not be in order under an amendment that was under consideration, Bell moved to strike out the enacting clause of the bill to give himself all the latitude he needed. It would seem that when he wished a hearing before Congress there were ways of getting it although he frequently complains of the majorities' insistence on cutting off debate. Bell believed that the President and Secretary are responsible for the wretched condition of affairs described by Cary.² This same condition of inefficiency continued throughout the internal improvement policy of the party. The bill for harbor improvement in 1836 came in for its share of condemnation at Bell's hands.

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1. Cong. Globe, Feb. 27, 1839. App. 366.
2. Ibid, Feb. 27, 1839. App. 366.

He charges that the bill is not so much for the purpose of improving harbors as to get rid of any surplus money in the treasury. He says it is the nature of these government works never to get done, many of the earlier works falling to pieces before the last was finished so that it became necessary to begin making them all over before the work was even completed, making each new enterprise a perpetual drain on the treasury. It was supposed that the vote on the Maysville Road bill had put a stop to this sort of internal improvement but it seemed not to be so. The committee on Ways and Means is constituted so that the largest expenditures will be made for which an excuse can be found, the members coming from New York City, Baltimore, Norfolk, Portland, Boston, Ohio and Tennessee, the sections that are most of all clamoring for internal improvements. In 1835 the entire appropriation for internal improvements was \$505,057, now the committee is asking for \$1,700,000.00. It looks like a permanent system. There is just as good reason for assisting the interior as the sea coast region and so Bell expects that there will be a race to see who will get the most. Some sections through superior political strength ^{and thru} combinations will secure more than

other sections and there will be a strong incentive in that to make the system permanent. If the money were to be divided proportionately among the states they would all be equally interested in raising or lowering the amount of tax. This surplus revenue is making a great increase in expenditures through the increase in the number of public officers, in the patronage, in the profligate waste of public money. Bell believes that if the surplus were divided among the states that they would look closely into national expenditures on account of their interest in the money they would expect from the government. Since one of the great principles of the Jackson party has always been to decrease the power of the internal government, surely none of that party would object to this measure. One of the evils that has resulted from this large surplus is shown by the fact that in the last six months the government has undertaken Indian wars that will cost at least \$10,000,000.00 withoutⁱⁿ any manner consulting Congress.¹

Bell returns to the attack in 1838. He says

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1. Deb. Cong. XII-IV, p. 4390, June 23, 1836.

the vote on the Cumberland Road bill has been considered a test of party loyalty by the administration men, that from being opposed to internal improvements as a principle the party has increased the expenditures for this purpose from one fourth a million to over \$2,000,000.00. That even now (1838) when the treasury is so depleted, the President, (Van Buren) has recommended internal improvements that amount to \$1,900,000.¹ He takes the same stand on the Cumberland Road bill in 1840. He is opposed to it on the ground of expediency rather than that of constitutionality. The principle was not sanctioned by the spirit of the constitution. He sees no end to the fever for securing money from the national treasury, for even during the season when the government was obliged to borrow money and issue treasury notes to pay its own expenses there was just as great a demand from the people and just as great appropriations made as when there was ^asurplus in the treasury.²

Freedom of Elections.

There was no question that interested Bell more

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1. Cong. Globe, May 12, 1838, p. 370.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 207, Feb. 17, 1840.

than the matter of executive interference in elections, Doubtless this was due in large measure to the fact that Jackson took so open a part against the attempt to bring White in as Jackson's successor and therefore brought the matter directly home to Bell. On this matter Bell holds the party leaders more responsible than Jackson, himself. In the past it had been considered quite out of place for the President to take any active part in the campaign and none of them had done so openly. Bell says now it is no longer a question as to whether or not the President has interfered in elections but whether or not is safe for the country for him to do so. No one would question the statement that for the last fifteen months he had taken an active part in the campaign for the election of Van Buren, but it was not so well known that he had interfered with the election of Representatives as well. He had not only done so by sending newspapers under his own frank, but had written many letters using his own signature denouncing men in character and motive who had dared to oppose Van Buren. One such letter had been read on the stump by a candidate for Congress. The matter of interfering with the Tennessee

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legislature had already been noticed. The thing that disturbed Bell most of all was the fact that the people were accepting it as a matter of fact and one that was of no particular importance. What makes the precedent the most dangerous is the confidence the people had in the patriotism and sagacity of the President. Bell read a quotation from Jackson's first inaugural address in which Jackson asserted that he would correct the abuse of the Federal patronage in interfering with the freedom of elections. If John Quincy Adams had done one thing equal to the many Jackson has done in interfering with elections, Bell believes that the House would have impeached him. Bell ^{reproaches} the party that claims Jefferson as its great progenitor for departing entirely from his principles and reminds them that Jefferson said that the interference of a public officer in an election would be ground for his removal. The sanction that the House has given to the open interference of Jackson in the election of his successor is as bad as anything the old Federalist party ever did. The best road to Presidential favor now is to work for the election of Van Buren, and Bell again refers to the large number of

Federal officials who took part in the conventions that were held to send men to the National Convention at Baltimore.¹

By 1837 Bell began to urge a bill to insure the freedom of elections.² After some difficulty the House consented to the introduction of the bill which was an attack on the spoils system as interfering with the freedom of elections. This bill would make the removal of an officer other than one who stood in the position of constitutional advisor to the government, a High misdemeanor, the interference of Federal officers in elections was to be prohibited by law, the contribution of money or the use of the franking privilege, interference by threat or menace or any other manner of intermeddling with national elections or state elections was prohibited to any officer, agent or contractor under penalty of a fine not to exceed \$1,000.00. For breaking this law all but the President, Vice President and United States judges were to be removed and prohibited from ever holding office under the government again. The promise of an office for political work in electing a

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1. Deb. Cong., XII-IV, pp. 4403, 4417, 4428. June 23, 1836.
2. Ibid., XIII-I, p. 1387, Jan. 14, 1837.

United States or state officer was to be a high misdemeanor and punishable with a fine not to exceed \$5,000.00. Any man who received an office for such work was to be removed, on conviction, and pay a fine not to exceed \$1,000.00 and be disqualified for ever holding office again.¹

In discussing the measure Bell assumed that no one will deny that men have been removed wholesale for political reasons, nor would any one deny that the whole force of government officers from the President to the lowest officer had been active in Federal elections. He said that the only charge to be proven was that men had been hired by promise of office to work for particular candidates, but when an appointment is made from among the ranks of the opposition and the appointee suddenly changes his politics, or when a man who has newly changed his politics is given office, Bell considers that proof enough. Bell says that the first overt act of Jackson against the freedom of elections was made when he dictated to the party the scheme of the Baltimore Convention. He followed this up by appearing on the stump in Tennessee and Peyton of Tennessee said that Jackson

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1. Deb. Cong., XIII-II, p. 1454, Jan. 25, 1837.

not only spoke of Wise of Virginia as a liar but said to the people that Bell told twenty lies in one speech and knew them to be lies, while Peyton was a bigger liar than Bell. Certainly there was no lack of plain speech in Tennessee. Bell says that men in his district received letters promising them rewards if they would work against White and says he knows of men who went over to ^{the} government candidate and afterwards received office.¹ Bell read Jefferson's order to federal officers to refrain from activity in elections. This speech received very little attention from either side and the bill was passed by practically without consideration. Bell was preaching a counsel of perfection that both sides seemed to understand to be quite beyond any practice that was likely to be followed by a people's party made up as were those in the United States at that time. There was one way to win victories and that was by organized effort and the men who were expected to make the most effort were those who had proven themselves to be the most capable and who had had their capabilities recognized by their appointment

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1. Deb. Cong. XIII-II, pp. 1454-1477,

to office.

In March 1838, Bell was again putting forward his bill for the freedom of elections, but with no success. Turney of Tennessee made a speech in which he denied that Jackson had taken part in the election contest against White and denounced Bell in the most offensive manner possible. In Bell's reply he defended himself, using, as J. Q. Adams says, gentlemanly language as he always did but in the tones "which the most exasperated resentment assumed to express unmitigated contempt." Bell said that he had never had personal relations with Turney who could have no motive of ill will toward himself, but that he had made himself the voluntary scavenger of all the filth raked up by others who set the attorney upon him. Turney sprang to his feet and cried, "It is false, it is false". At this Bell struck Turney with his fist, there was great excitement, they were separated and both men apologized. Adams says that Bell continued his speech of vindication, "But as he kept himself within the rules of order, his discourse was stale and flat, like a pot of small beer after a bumper

of pure whiskey."¹

Bell in answer to Turney gave a most detailed account of Jackson's part in the White campaign in Tennessee. He said that in the summer of 1836 Jackson went all through Mr. Carter's district expressing his views verbally and on paper. He wrote the citizens of Bedford and Shelby that the men who were urging White's candidacy were trying to undermine our free institutions and would deliver the nation into the arms of Federalists, Nullifiers and new born Whigs. Bell read extracts from Jackson's letters and said that Cave Johnson had the originals of these letters and read them to the people from the stump. He said that numberless copies of the Globe, full of the most malignant/^{mis-}representations of his course and motive, were sent broadcast over the whole country under Jackson's frank and by members of Congress as well.² Nothing came of the bill, In February 1840, Bell's bill was again before the House but was not given consideration until April 1st, In Bell's mind this was the most important bill of the

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1. J. Q. Adams, Memoirs, IX, p. 550.

2. Cong. Globe, App. May 31, 1838, p. 558.

session. He had had great trouble in getting the measure introduced, it was no different from the one that he introduced before but it was freely stigmatized as a gag law by members of the administration party, and likened to the Alien and Sedition laws of John Adams' administration. Bell retorted that the members of a House where the gag was regularly applied through the previous question ought not to shy at a gag. He charged that the majority had tried to prevent the introduction of his bill so that they might go before the people at the coming of the next election with the statement that it was so atrocious that the House could not even allow it to be introduced. He gave an amusing illustration of the sort of an editorial that he imagined would have been published the next morning in the Globe if the vote allowing his bill to be introduced had failed. It is well worth giving an extract of it here as it is a fair example of the newspaper abuse of the period. "That notorious Federalist and deserter from the Democratic ranks (John Bell of Tennessee)

had the audacity yesterday, to ask leave of the House to introduce a second edition of the Alien and Sedition laws of 1798 but the prompt and vigilant spirit of democracy, . . . saved the country from consideration of a measure so odious and dangerous." Bell says that the majority have talked as though he was the author of a monstrous and outrageous measure against the liberties of the country.¹ Bell added nothing of importance to his former argument but he seemed to be more exasperated and allows himself greater license of expression, he makes it clear that he wishes to place the President and higher officers under possibility of impeachment for wholesale interference with the elections. Of course the bill met the same fate as the others but the time was drawing near when the political tide was to turn and place Bell in a position where he himself might be tempted to use something of the same sort of methods that he was denouncing so vigorously now. The spoils system was to become so firmly fixed upon the country that every dominant

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1. Cong. Globe, p. 829, April 1st, 1840.

party came to use it as a matter of course and the day came when even Bell was forced to become something of an apologist for the system.

The Spoils System.

Bell's effort to establish freedom of election was but the forerunner of a general attack upon the Jackson party. It might be difficult to find a more thorough-going and comprehensive analysis of the workings of that pernicious system that may be found in Bell's speeches in and out of Congress during the period from 1835 to 1841. Bell's first public criticism of the spoils system appears in a letter written by him to the people of Tennessee and printed in the Columbia Observer of September 15, 1835. This is soon after the Vauxhall speech in Nashville where he made his first open break with Jackson. In that letter he denounced the Spoils System as unrepugnant. He declares that it is a greater danger than conventions and caucuses for it will convert the national treasury into electioneering capital to be distributed among the majority as pay for party services. He observes that if the party

leaders are ever able to quote Jackson in favor of the spoils system that not one thing will be left of the early principles of the Jackson party, it will no longer be a question of what is left of Jacksonism but of what is left of the constitution and and liberty.¹ Of course Bell knew at the time that Jackson was for the spoils system but he was not quite ready to accuse him of it in Tennessee although the Tennesseans knew it as well as Bell did. He was working for the effect of indirect suggestion on their minds.

By June, 1836, Bell was prepared to bring on an open fight on the spoils question. He declared that the party had no principles except the sharing of spoils and that it declared principles only to delude the people. Jackson was not so responsible for the abuses of the system as the leaders of the party who worked under him. He traced the spoils system from its origin in New York state and holds Van Buren responsible for it. One great danger of the system, as he sees it, is that the rank and file of the party have nothing to say of the policy of the party but all is left to the chief.

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1. Niles Register, 49:117, Quoted from the Columbia Observer.

Nothing could be more degrading to the spirit of American citizenship than this. In New York the spoils system controlled the operations of both parties, it prevailed to a considerable extent in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Maine with complete control in New Hampshire. Bell enumerated the evils of the system in bringing on sudden changes in the course of politics, corrupt practices, excesses and abuses, and the degradation of public morals. The greater the patronage the worse the evils. When every officer from a judge to a toll-keeper fears he may be turned out at any election, servility and hypocrisy must develop. Inferior and inefficient officers will be appointed, their fitness for the office being tested only by their services to the party or the personal fortunes of the chief. A President chosen by such means will use the patronage to bring about his re-election and then dictate the choice of his successor by the same methods.

The force of Bell's language may be seen in many phrases, although the reporters do not often get the speeches verbatim. Bell says the seeds of this (spoils) system "lie deeply imbedded in the new system of the party tactics and discipline which threaten to

fasten its deadly and corrupting fangs upon every state in this Union." When this gets to be national in its extent imagine "the degradation of the national character, the mean grade of ambition which must distinguish the leading men of the country, the general corruption." He says that Federal officers should not vote under such conditions. With one hundred thousand office holders working to keep their offices and as many more working to get them, the fate of the most vital questions may turn on the choice of a man who can wield the greatest weight of spoils. If the President shall be able to choose his own successor for a time and dictate the choice of the Speaker of the House we shall soon be far on the road toward a monarchy. He charged that with the powers of the President as then exercised that the government was an elective monarchy. Bell was hitting directly at Jackson in this for he was charging him with selecting Van Buren and making him his successor and of controlling the administration men in the election of Polk as Speaker over Bell, himself. The personal element in this may well have weakened the force of Bell's accusations.

Bell as a disciple of Jefferson sees the consolidation that the Virginia school so much dreaded already accomplished through the party organizations based on spoils. This seemed to him especially reprehensible since the Jackson party began as a protest against the use of patronage in office. Bell becomes personal in alluding to a certain Saunders of North Carolina who in Adam's administration brought in a resolution of condemnation because a certain printer had lost a job, now the same Saunders holds an office obtained by the removal of its holder for political reasons.

The party leaders have made excuse for their wholesale reprisals by saying that there was such a crisis in the National's affairs that any means were justifiable to oust the bad men in office and save the country. This furnishes Bell with an opportunity to show up the conglomeration of elements that went to make up the first great Democratic party. He was well qualified for the task and had taken occasion to do the same thing before when he was being accused of not being "regular". This time he enters greatly

into detail. He reviews the party's record on internal improvements and shows how divided it has been and still is. He reminds them that ~~were~~ it not for the Cumberland Road exception in favor of the Northwest that the states north of the Ohio would not remain in the party. Besides the men from these states, nearly all from Kentucky and Pennsylvania are still internal improvement men. Van Buren is non-committal but the people north of the Ohio are sure he is for internal improvements while those south are just as sure he is against them.

The Tariff was supposed to be a party question but Van Buren and the candidate for Vice President voted for the tariff in 1828, the most odious tariff the country had ever known. It has been said that they did so for the party. Bell said that . . . was just the point, for the party, but against the people, and that is the great objection to this party "whose only bond of union is the expectation of sharing the patronage of the government." On Nullification the party was equally divided, on Indian affairs the same. The Pennsylvania delegation was entirely against Georgia on the

Indian question but the two delegations unite to exterminate White who had done more than any other man in Congress to assist Georgia. On the bank question there was equal division. No one could tell from Van Buren's long speeches which way he would fall. Johnson was for a bank and Jackson would ~~sign~~ a bill for a bank somewhat modified, while McLane and Forsyth were for the bank. For all that, Bell had been more abused for his attitude on the bank than for any other thing. The New York members would take a bank now if they could get one, and still this party professes to be one of principle. Bell can see no principle as has been said before, but the principle of getting and keeping the spoils.¹

In January 1837, Bell was again attacking the party for the spoils system. This time he proposes reform in regard to the appointment of officers and complains that Jackson had made one thousand removals for political reasons only. Bell is shocked because men of distinction on all sides have defended the principle by saying that in no other way can the party be held together. He says that the Whig party has done the same thing when in control

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1. Deb. Cong., XII-IV, p. 4407 to 4427, June 23, 1836.

in a state. To Bell this is a public disgrace. He says, "I do not believe that any government can continue free under its operation." He fears that every election will come to be a mere scramble for office, general corruption will ensue, thence violence, thence disintegration. It is interesting in the light of later developments and even of present conditions to read how shocked Bell was at the idea that in New York it was said that the state officers contributed a percentage of their salaries for the support of the party organization. The money from the people being used, as he said, for their corruption. In the face of this sort of party manipulation, Kendall, the Postmaster General, had written a public letter rejoicing over the result of a certain Pennsylvania election and calling it a victory of "virtuous people over concentrated wealth, mercenary talent and licensed corruption." Bell can find no words to express his scorn. His faintest words are "mercenary", "tyrannical", "corrupting", "detestible".¹

Again in May, 1838, in his reply to the attack of Turney, after revising the course of the administrations of Jackson and Van Buren he declared that the

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1. Deb. Cong. XIII-II, pp.1455-1477. Jan. 25, 1837.
A three days speech.

worst feature of the abuses that have been brought upon the country is the spoils system. He attributes the causes of the disorders of the country to the bringing of the finances under tribute to the patronage through the destruction of the United States Bank. He said that the people thought that the great issue was the Bank, but that was not so, the real issue was the control of all the departments of the government for the sake of patronage. At this point Bell gave the history of the introduction of the spoils system into national affairs. He says that the first suggestion of it was in a letter written by Van Buren to Monroe in 1823, urging the principle of appointments for party reasons.¹ In December in commenting on Van Buren's message to Congress he says that the expenditures of the government have increased under the party from \$13,000,000.00 to \$30,000,000.00 and that the money was largely wasted through the inefficiency and dishonesty of government officers due to their appointments for political services and not on account of fitness for the office.

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1. Cong. Globe, App., May 31, 1838, p. 558.

The President had indirectly admitted that there was very little embezzlement among United States officers until recently and Bell says it is due to the spoils system. He fears war and revolutions will come from it.¹ When the civil and dipomatic appropriation bill was before the House in February 1839, Bell again returned to the attack. He asserts that the action of the administration had been a course of imbecility, and proposed to check the appointing power of the President by withholding salaries from officers whom the House did not consider qualified.²

Removal of Officers.

One of the particular lines of attack that Bell followed through, in his arrangement of the spoils system, was the power of removal of officers by the President. He first takes this up in January 1838 with a statement that the President is becoming the whole power in the government through his power of removal and his domination of the elections. He asserts that both

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1. Cong. Globe, Dec. 25, 1838, p. 361.

2. Ibid., App., Feb. 27, 1839, p. 366.

Hamilton and Jefferson believed that the consent of the Senate should be obtained for the removal of an officer just as it must be for his appointment, but he did not press the point at that time.¹ Bell's references to the appointing and removing powers of the President are so numerous and all so much of the same character that it is impracticable to notice more than a very few of them. In the last reference, given, Bell says that the great danger of our institutions is in the vast development of the one man power that the country has witnessed since Jackson came into office. He says in December 1838, that the President reasons that since it is his exclusive duty to execute the laws that he must also interpret the laws and use his discretion as to which ones should be enforced. To do this he must select the officers and if they are not satisfactory to him, remove them. This, he says, is "a perfect scheme of despotic power," a one man government.² In February 1839, he again suggests that the power of the President must be in some way curbed and since impeach-

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1. Deb. Cong. XIII-II, p. 145, Jan. 25, 1837.

2. Cong. Globe, App. Dec. 26, 1838, p. 359. ff.

ment is impracticable, he would offer some substitute for it if the public mind were prepared for it. In England, if an executive were to prove as inefficient as Van Buren had been in regard to the maintenance of order on the Canadian frontier, there would be a motion for a more capable ministry. It is after this time that he proposed to control appointments through withholding the salaries of incapable or untrustworthy men.¹ In 1840, he carries out this idea by introducing the bill that made the removal of an officer for political reasons a high misdemeanor, that is, impeachable offense, hoping it will deter any executive hereafter from removing an officer for partisan reasons.² Of course nothing came of these measures and doubtless Bell did not expect any action on the part of Congress. What he was endeavoring to do was to interest the people in the dangers of the situation.

This fear of Bell's that the affairs of the country will come to a crisis is seen all through his speeches in his remarks against the increasing personal power of

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1. Cong. Globe, App., Feb. 27, 1839, p. 366.

2. Ibid., App. April 1, 1840, p. 829.

the President. In 1836, he hopes the time will come when the executive officers will feel some responsibility to the people for their acts. The point he is discussing here is the action of Jackson' in expending \$10,000,000.00 in Indian wars in six months without even referring the matter to Congress.¹ This centering of authority is bringing about a consolidation of the government completely sub-servient of the principles of government established by the constitution. He varies the charge at this point by saying that the party machinery controls the Houses of Congress and the President, but soon the President will throw off the control of the party and become the sole power. Even now it is difficult to bring any criticism to bear against the system and there is a general sentiment that the President is not responsible to the House of Representatives in any way. He suggests that the House has the power of impeachment in its hands which make it the constitutional supervisor of the executive.²

Bell is here showing, inadvertently, that the

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1. Deb. Cong., XII-IV, p. 4395, June 23, 1836.
2. Ibid., XII-IV, p. 4403, June 23, 1836.

country was experiencing one of the rather frequent periods in our history when the people have greater confidence in the President than in Congress. The people cannot be frightened into fearing evil at the hands of a man they trust and politicians are coming to realize that the power in this country may always be wielded by the man or group of men who make the people feel that they are the ones to be trusted with the accomplishment of what the public demands. Technically, or rather theoretically, Bell is right in fearing the one man power and the country has faced the situation since that time, but the people have not been told so many times that they are the real masters to ~~in~~ purpose, and have perfect confidence in their ability to take power from the hands of any party or group when they no longer trust them. At the present time the country is looking to the President rather than to Congress for the adjustment of conditions that they think need adjusting.

The same sentiment that is now abroad in the land in regard to what President Wilson will do with Congress was evident at that time. Bell says that in

former times when he was journeying back and forth between Tennessee and Washington the people would ask, "what will Congress do?" Now they ask, "what will Jackson do?" He says that the only independent spirit shown in Congress in two years has been in connection with the deposit and distribution bills and that was because the men who thought they would profit by the use of the money if deposited in the state banks were in opposition to those who thought they could profit by it if distributed among several states.¹ Perhaps Bell did not realize at this time that he was soon to be a champion of the distribution of the surplus among the states.

Bell finally concludes that one method of restraining the power of the President over the House was by doing away with the Viva Voce method of voting and substitute a secret ballot in its place. In calling upon the States Rights men to assist him in this he referred to the viva voce method as a whip held over the administration men to compel them to keep in line. Pickens

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1. Deb. Cong., XIII-II, p. 1457, Jan. 25, 1837.

retorted that the method was introduced in 1834 when Bell was Speaker.¹ There was a long discussion and four different men took occasion to remind Bell that he had once seemed less afraid of executive power. Bell made what J. Q. Adams called a "strong speech".² He declared that no monarch in England since the Stuarts had wielded greater power than the last two Presidents. He says members are afraid to vote their own convictions through fear of the President and the party chiefs and press, that men refuse to enter politics because of the subserviency necessary for a successful man in the party. He explains in regard to his being Speaker at the time the viva voce rule was adopted that his tenure of office was during a period of great confusion of parties and under very extraordinary circumstances. He declares that there was no connection between him and the President as far as his duties were concerned and that although it was a stormy session he was sure that no member felt that he had been partial on either side. He certainly was not the organ of the executive for he was put into office

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1. Cong. Globe, p. 69, Dec. 20, 1839.

2. J. Q. Adams, Memoirs, X, p. 172.

in direct opposition to Jackson's wishes.¹ It goes without saying that the viva voce rule was not altered. It is interesting to observe that rules do not seem dangerous under ordinary circumstances, especially when favorable to the parties concerned. Then "the people" can be relied upon to see that justice will be done, great faith is expressed in the power of self government, but when any rule is abused, then the first attack is on the rule rather than on the men ~~who~~ are using it. We as a people have great faith in saving ourselves from ourselves through constitutional and legal devices. It is possible that the easiest way of bringing attention to the evil is by attacking the rule, but our error lies in the notion so common that the evil may be prevented in the future by changing the rule, which is merely the medium through which the evil, for the time being, is expressing itself.

An illustration of the last named principle is shown by Bell's attempt to take the Post Office Department out of the hands of the government and put it into

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1. Cong. Globe, App., Dec. 21, 1839, p. 187.

the control of private individuals in order to limit the patronage of the administration party. He began with a motion to repeal the law prohibiting private individuals and companies from carrying letters for hire. He spoke at some length but no report was made. A few points may be gained from the answer to his speech, Mann of New York said Bell would destroy the whole postal system because it was a monopoly assumed without warrant of the constitution, that the framers of the constitution nearly forgot to mention it at all, and that the words of the constitution giving Congress the right to establish post offices and post roads did not prohibit the states from doing the same thing. The motion was lost without count.¹ There are many instances such as this where the reporters, using their judgment of what was important, leave out the main address and put in a more elaborate account of the less important ones. J. Q. Adams complains in many cases in his Memoirs for this period that the reporters are partial and incompetent. In one place in the Debates of Congress when the reporters were charged with garbling reports they defended

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1. Deb. Cong., XII-III, p. 3785, May 19, 1836.

themselves by saying they did not pretend to give whole speeches and had to use their judgment as to what was important but that they did their best to be impartial. The next day Bell moved that the President with the senate should name three commissioners to do the work of the Post Master General. His object was to reduce the power of appointment of the chief of the department. The motion was summarily rejected.¹

Bell again showed his lack of faith in the officials of the department in 1838 when he endeavored to make the appropriation bill for the Post Office so specific that no discretion would be left in the matter of handling the funds. He considered that the putting of the money of the department in the treasury was a pretense, that it was kept in the hands of the department, itself. The majority assumed to agree with him that the money ought to go to the Treasury as the law prescribed, but did not seem inclined to discuss the matter. No action was taken. In 1839 his attack was more formal. He introduced a set of resolutions to the effect/^{that} a government monopoly being the worst form of monopoly, the public post with its

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1. Deb. Cong., p. 3810, May 20, 1836.

exclusive privileges could be considered constitutional only so long as it is necessary and essential to the operations of the government. (This is the old Jeffersonian strict construction view). That the executive right of the Federal government to carry mail for hire was assumed in the beginning because of the low state of finances and credit, not upon any ground of constitutional right. Since it is based on such questionable grounds it is neither expedient nor justifiable with our present increased credit and resources. He thinks that the carrying of letters for hire should be open to all citizens so that the public may have the advantage of "increased regularity, cheapness, and expedition which are sure to follow from a free competition of private capital and enterprise in this as in all other pursuits."¹ Even giving Bell credit for not conceiving of the latest development of monopolies, this conception of a national postal system managed and carried on by private enterprise does not do much credit to his judgment which was surely warped by his detestation of the abuses of the government patronage. Bell offered these resolutions on the day

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1. Cong. Globe, p. 184, Feb. 11, 1839.

when the roll of state has called (each second Monday) and every member could offer such resolutions as he saw fit to present. This ended his attempts to wrest the Postal Department from the hands of the spoils men.

Humbugs of the Jackson Party.

One of the interesting phases of Bell's campaign against the Jackson party is his exposure of what he calls its humbugs. He says the people have been deluded with false issues and treated like children to strengthen the party.¹ The first humbug practiced upon the people was in the matter of retrenchment of expenses. When the Post Master General (Amos Kendall), then the fourth auditor of the Treasury, refused to take certain newspapers at public expense but paid for them out of his own pocket, the act was heralded all over the country. It was to be but a "grain of sand in the great movement of reform". Bell said the appropriations for the present year (1836), exclusive of expenses connected with Indian affairs are one hundred per cent greater than they were in any year of the Adams' and Clay administra-

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1. Deb. Cong., XII-III, p. 2834, March 21, 1836.

tion, so roundly abused by the Jackson men for its extravagance. The next humbug was the dreadful alarm expressed because of the ownership of stock in the United States Bank by foreigners. It was feared that unless the Bank was overthrown that it would soon be under the control of the nobility of England.¹

Perhaps the most ridiculous farce was the proposal for a gold and silver currency. "This was urged with all the apparent zeal ^{of} candor and all the confidence of success." Bell says it helped the party most of all. In many of the states it was the one engrossing theme. By some sort of magic art Jackson would supply the country with an abundance of gold and silver, all the people had to do was to vote for Jackson and soon they would be handling gold and silver coins instead of depreciated bank notes. Jackson took some of the newly-coined gold pieces with him to Tennessee and showed them to the people. When Jackson in a public address said that gold and silver coin were the only constitutional currency, the people were convinced that any man who favored a bank was an enemy to the country. Bell said that Senator

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1. Deb. Cong., XII-IV, p. 4426, ff.

Grundy was especially active in deluding the people in this matter in public addresses. At the time there were more than four hundred banks in operation and all with the right to issue notes. The Globe was urging the establishment of more banks and Taney, Secretary of the Treasury, wrote a letter (April 15, 1834) to the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee in which he stated that the bank notes must always "form the ordinary circulating medium for the great body of our citizens. He wrote that it was "neither practicable nor desirable to discountenance the continuance of these (state) banks". There must be a liberal system of credits and facilities for obtaining money on loans, "This cannot be obtained without the aid of a paper circulation founded on credit." In the same year Benton was sure it would be practical to establish a gold and silver currency. It seems amazing to Bell that the project should prove the most effective weapon ever used by the party, with the leading men talking gold and silver to the people while the official organ, the Globe, and the Secretary of the Treasury were sure no such scheme could be put through.¹ After

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1. Deb. Cong., XII-IV, pp. 4428 ff.

such an account as this one wonders whether Jackson was in any degree sincere on the question but no longer doubts that the American people loved to be humbugged. It is easy to see in imagination the Democratic orators holding up their netted purses that the glint of the bright yellow coins might show through while the people gazed with open mouths and thanked God that he had sent Jackson in time to save the country.

The greatest humbug, Bell says, is the assertion that the Jackson party is the only one looking after the interests of the people. When criticism is brought to bear upon the party, the answer is flung back that the people have sanctioned everything by their votes. Bell says that the idea that has become a dogma of the party, that the people can do no wrong, and that a measure of government is above criticism because sanctioned by them, is "one of the most fallacious and insidious doctrines that can be started in a free government."¹ It was a bold man who said those words in the Congress of the United States in 1836 in opposition to Andrew Jackson.

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1. Deb. Cong., XII-IV, p. 4433, June 23, 1836.

Bell calls this doctrine of the infallability of the people the first great error in principle of the Jackson party. The second great error is the dogma that the people can and do direct the government. This appears in an extended criticism of Van Buren's message to Congress in December 1838. The President had congratulated the country on the changes that have increased the direct influence of the mass of the people on the government. The President spoke on the constant and direct supervision of the people over every public measure. Bell says our salvation lies in the fact that the people do not have direct supervision over the measures of the government. He believes the people have less influence than ever on account of the party machine settling everything in advance although the administration party is constantly talking about the "Democracy of numbers".¹

The "Investigation" of Jackson's Administration.

This interesting but abortive attempt to bring the Jackson administration and its misdeeds into the

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1. Cong. Globe, App. p. 359, Dec. 26, 1838.

light of day is credited to Bell as author, or chief investigator by the Past History.¹ Bell has borne the chief part of the general assault but whether he commanded this particular forelorn hope or not is uncertain. Wise of Virginia who shared with Bell the honor of being the "oracles" of the Whig party,² made the motion for the committee of investigation, he was chairman of the committee and Bell was not a member. The investigation was provoked by the closing passage in Jackson's last annual message to Congress, Dec. 5, 1836, The passage sounds mild enough but after the flaying that the Administration had undergone at their hands, doubtless Bell and Wise felt personally insulted by the complacency of it. Jackson says that it is due to the various departments that he bears testimony to their prosperous condition, and to the ability and integrity with which they have been conducted. It has been his aim to enforce in all of them a vigilant and faithful discharge of the public business and it was gratifying to him to believe that there was no just complaint from any quarter.³ This was too much and

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1. Past History, p. 9.

2. Deb. Cong., XIV-II, p. 1361, Oct. 9, 1837.

3. Ibid., XIII-I, Mar. 3, 1837.

Wise made the motion for investigation into the condition of the various executive departments, the manner of conducting the public business, complaints from any quarter concerning duties pertaining to the public interests, in what way they ^{have} fulfilled or/failed to fulfill their duties or have injured the public service. The committee was to refer to such periods of time as they should think proper. Surely a sweeping task and one to test the ability of any committee.¹ There were nine on the committee. The majority were, of course, administration men and they first decided that the House of Representatives, having no right to investigate except with the idea of impeachment, they would look into nothing that was not in the nature of a high crime or misdemeanor, worthy of impeachment.

The charges were serious enough as presented to the committee. Corrupt violation of duty, abusing legal authority, corrupting and subsidizing the press, retaining corrupt and fraudulent officers, interfering with the proceedings of Congress in an improper manner,

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1. Deb. Cong., p. 1399.

keeping men in office after they had been proven guilty of dishonest and corrupt practices, etc. The majority report devotes seven pages to throwing odium on the instigators of the investigation. They assert that the people have triumphantly sustained the administration in the policy of appointing friends to office rather than enemies. That seems to be all the excuse they need to urge in defense of the spoils system. The crux of the affair came when the chairman demanded that the departments give an account of all the money paid to newspapers during the last year. The committee would not accede to the chairman's demands and responded by declaring that the opposition supported more daily papers than the administration anyway, and they gave their names and locations. Jackson wrote a letter to the committee couched in true Jacksonian phrase saying the departments would answer specific charges but would not furnish information to the committee. He took refuge under the undoubted right of the American citizen that he should not be compelled to incriminate himself. (p.201). Of course, the object of the committee was to investigate and it found itself utterly unable to do

so. Bell was called before the committee on the order of the President.¹ A proceeding which he considered a flagrant breach of privilege, and made a formal protest which was made a matter of record.² The various departments, as called on, sent replies similar to Jackson's and since the majority of the committee justified their action, little could be done. The minority made a report but it is difficult to estimate what effect the affair had on the public mind. It certainly served to embitter the feeling in Congress between the two parties which were already hating each other with the intensity which only factional warfare knows. How the Jackson men and Jackson, himself, could refuse to give information concerning the statistics of their departments, or as to how they were managed, on the ground that they could not be compelled to incriminate themselves, and still retain the confidence of the people, is quite beyond comprehension. Such action to day would be the death blow to any party. The majority report devotes a great part of its time to showing that what the minority was after

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1. Deb. Cong., XIII-II, p. 189. ff. Mar. 3, 1837.
2. Cong. Globe, App., May 31, 1838, p. 358.

was evidence on which to impeach Jackson. They boldly faced the issue on the ground that if the people could be convinced that that was what the majority was after it would "damn them to everlasting fame" and forever fix Jackson in the nation's affections. To an impartial observer, it would seem that if they were bent on impeaching Jackson and he refused information on the ground that he could not be compelled to incriminate himself, that there must have been much that he and the department did not wish disclosed.

The Sub-Treasury and Treasury Note Bills.

When the Van Buren scheme of a sub-treasury was proposed to Congress Bell took alarm at once. To his mind it was but another plan to put the finances and the patronage that went with it, directly into the hands of the administration. He said that the evils of a bank were as nothing compared with this. As to its being in any way helpful to the country (this was the special session due to the panic) Bell did not believe that it had any

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relation to it. He had told his people before he left for Washington that nothing the government could do would relieve the situation.¹ In 1840 Bell again attacked the sub-treasury scheme in several long speeches which were not reported. There was a great deal of filibustering going on in the attempt to discourage Bell from speaking. While he was in the midst of his address some one would object, rise to a point of order and appeal from the decision of the chair. There would be no quorum present, then a motion to adjourn would be made which would be defeated, a quorum being present. In this way Bell was interrupted several times.² During this period Bell's speeches are never reported at any length unless he writes them out and hands them in for publication when they appear in the appendix which was published at the end of the session. Seemingly the reporters either thought his speeches were not worth reporting or they were partisan as J. Q. Adams charged them with being. The publication of Bell's speeches at the close of the session prevented their being gotten before the people

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1. Deb. Cong., XIV-I, pp. 593, 594, Sept. 11, 1837.

2. Cong. Globe, June 17, 1840, p. 472. J. Q. Adams
Memoirs, X, 312.

while the interest of the debate was at its height. Bell was not in the habit of writing his speeches, I should judge from their make-up, and consequently many of them cannot be found.

The Treasury Note Bill introduced from the Senate authorizing the issuing of \$12,000,000. in treasury notes was the answer of the administration to the financial needs of the government. These bills were not to be issued in denominations under \$100. and were to bear interest after one year if presented and not paid by the government. Bell is convinced that this is a scheme, with the plan hinted at in the report of the Secretary of the Treasury, to form a bank based directly on the treasury of the United States. On the one hand the administration talks about doing away with all banks, yet this looks as though some understanding had been made with the representatives of the state banks to let them live if the government is allowed to furnish a part of the circulating medium of the country. He is certain that this will mean a depreciated currency which the people will have to use while the government accepts nothing but gold and silver. This is another instance of the lack of the ~~lack~~ influence of the people or their

representatives, for he understands that the whole thing has been prepared beforehand and that the Treasurer has actually had the notes made in anticipating of the passage of the bill. The government urges that it must have the treasury notes because its money is tied up in the suspended deposit banks. Bell shows that the money is available enough through the sale of the protested notes. He is informed that the protested notes are within one per cent of being at par in New York City at the present time. If the government had not been so grossly extravagant there would be no need of this wholesale flooding of the country with government promises to pay. Bell's remedy is for the government to use bank notes where they are receivable for goods at par, although not as valuable as gold and silver. This will be no injustice for the bank bills now, even of suspended banks, have a great^{er} purchasing power than gold had before the panic, on account of the fall in prices. This will be easy to do for the government has the most money in suspended banks in the very regions where it is now expending the most money, in Florida where the Indian war is still on, in Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana for

subsisting the Indians west of the Mississippi. The same is true in the northwest. The principal amount of the debt in these regions being owed to the banks, people are anxious to get the bank notes. Bell meets the arguments against the unconstitutionality of this by saying, "suppose it would be", the government is no better than the people who are compelled to use the depreciated paper on account of the bad mistakes of the party in power. The states have some rights and still they have been compelled to lose their accepted circulation for this pretended gold and silver money or for government paper money. He charges that the government is purposely keeping the state banks' from resuming specific payments by refusing to receive bank paper in payment for custom duties. Bell does not say this as a champion of state banks for if "I were to consult my own feelings I would not suffer an incorporated bank to exist." (p.1341). However, he would not destroy them now because they are so closely associated with the business of the country. He holds that the government should never issue treasury notes except in great national emergencies. If it were done now, there would never come a time when economy would be practised if

in every flurry the government should issue notes instead of retrenching expenses. There will never be an end of the patronage now that the government has found that it can obtain money by simply printing it.¹ This speech does Bell the least credit of any he made in opposition to the administration either of Jackson or of Van Buren. It was quite out of his ordinary tone to scout the question of constitutionality, he should have known the obligation of the United States government to use sound money whether the people could get it or not, especially when it came to paying creditors, and there was no way of getting it except at the ports of entry for customs duties. He sounds in this speech more like a politician and less like a statesman than in any address he made.

He returns to the attack in May. He asserts that the House has been deceived as to the amount of money in the treasury and that if the available funds were used there would be no need of the treasury notes. Bell urges a permanent loan instead of the notes. The

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1. Deb. Cong., XIV-II, p, 1326 to 1342, Oct. 4, 1837.

revenue had been reduced in a few years from \$48,000,000 to \$15,000,000. This was the fault of the dominant party which was now trying out the people to see how much they would stand and if this was accepted, the United States Treasury would then be converted into a bank. Bell charges that everything possible was done before 1837 to facilitate over expansion of business, the states were encouraged to start new state banks, new land was thrown on the market, facilities were given to banks to enable them to expand and in the midst of it the specie circular stopped everything and the weight of the burden had fallen on the prescribed states of Alabama and Mississippi.¹ Bell does not explain that those two states were notorious for their wild speculation and over trading with the banks fairly become land banks for the purpose of financing the cotton business from planter to merchant, retailer, jobber and exporter. The bill passed with some minor modifications by a vote of 106 to 99, close enough to show the narrow margin on which the party was standing.

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1. Cong. Globe, May 12, 1838, p. 370.

When the Democrats introduce another bill for treasury notes in 1841 Bell prefers a loan but since that cannot be accomplished does not think the amount (\$5,000,000.) nearly enough. He charges that it is the intention of the party since it has been voted out of power to leave the incoming administration without the means of maintaining the government without a special session. He calls the cry of the party for economy a death bed repentance which can fool no one. This is a very rambling speech and not nearly as much to the point as most of Bell's speeches. It looks as though, since the Democrats were already defeated, his opposition was merely perfunctory.¹

Defense of the Spoils System.

In the fall of 1837 Bell made a tour of the Eastern States in the interests of the Whig party. He was received with great enthusiasm, made many speeches, was given a banquet in New York City where he spoke and where Webster made an address in his honor and on the topics of the day.² At Hartford, Conn., Bell made a

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1. Cong. Globe, App., Jan. 20, 1841, p. 114.
2. Niles Register, 53:210, Dec. 2, 1837.

long and characteristic address similar to his many attacks on the spoils system and the new party machinery of the Jackson men. He speaks of the victory of the Whigs in Tennessee as the "greatest triumph in the history of a free people", calls it "a triumph over despotism". He was free to denounce the spoils system because as yet he did not realize that it was to dominate all parties and if he had known, he would have denounced it just the same. It was next to impossible for a man of Bell's temperament and high ideals of patriotism to understand the practical necessity for the spoils system and party machinery that had been developed in New York, if the party of the people was to in any way control the government. His sharp attack on the Democratic party for having no principles, which amounted to proving that it was made up of groups of men holding many views, shows the absolute necessity for party machinery and leadership if the people, and certainly the Democratic party was the people, were to have any voice in the affairs of the government. We were so composite, so sectional, so varied, in our interests, that action was hopeless

without a combination so strong that the individual would be lost in the whole while the organization accomplished in a measure the wishes of all. It was found by experience that men must hold true to the organization and often yield their individual or sectional preferences in the interests of the party in order that some part of their ends might be accomplished. In this way party loyalty became almost a religion, with its dogmas and with a hierarchy and priesthood as absolute as ever the Middle Ages ever saw.

This organization must be supported. As long as the people took their politics from eminent leaders like Jefferson or Madison there had been no need for great expenditures, but when the leadership was to fall into the hands of a social class of their own equals and competition became close and sharp there must be some method for rewarding those who spent their time in the services of the party and the spoils system answered the requirement. When the public conscience became so aroused that this was no longer possible the great corporations who expected protection and freedom from interference, were called on to contribute

millions for campaign funds, resulting in an obtuseness and disregard for the people's interests and accompanying evils worse than anything the spoils system every brought upon the country. It remains to be seen what will next be tried to maintain party organization since the great corporations may no longer be called upon for contributions as in the past. One result is already evident, the Presidential candidates must themselves take the stump and appeal directly to the people, become acknowledged party leaders to whom the people are to look for legislation. The people no longer have to ask some travelling Congressman, as in Bell's day, what the President will do, he goes to them directly and promises them what he will do. It would be interesting to read Bell's comments if in 1836 he had foreseen the late Taft-Roosevelt campaign in Ohio.

Estimate of Bell.

It is not difficult to fix Bell's place in the House of Representatives during this period. In the early part of Jackson's administration he shared with McDuffy and Polk the leadership of the Jackson party. He never countenanced the extravagances of the party

and was too broad-minded and too independent to support measures he did not believe in. In his speeches he nearly always takes a more comprehensive view of things than most of the men who speak in the House. Adams is far better informed on many subjects than Bell, but Adams is extremely vindictive and irascible beyond all restraint and had very little faith in a government by the people. Everett was a far more polished orator but he was inclined to take stereotyped views of live questions and had very little sympathy for the stern, active, belligerent, traditional West which had come into control of the national policy. Polk was a greater stump speaker than Bell but had no such breadth of mind and was fundamentally a party man in the Democratic party sense.¹ The only men who overshadowed Bell in poise, breadth of view, and ability to express his ideas in clear, graceful, forceful English were Clay, Webster, Calhoun, and they were all in the Senate during the period that Bell was in the House of Representatives.

As early as June 1836, the Globe spoke of Bell as the leader of the Whig party.² From that time on he is

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1. Phelan, History of Tennessee, p. 404.
2. Deb. Cong. XII-IV, p. 4396.

looked upon as the most dangerous man the Democrats had to face in the House and he was complimented by receiving the main part of the abuse of the administration. The "Past History" gives him credit for being the chief opponent of the Jackson and Van Buren administrations, abusing him for leaving Jackson, of course, and speaks of his speech of June 23, 1836, as "Bell's Great Attack on the Jackson Administration".¹ October 9th, Gholson of Mississippi, in replying to Bell's speech on the Treasury note bill speaks of Bell and Wise, "who are regarded by me and the country as the oracles of the Whig party". Phalan refers to Bell as "having the ablest mind that Tennessee has ever produced, after Jackson's and Andrew Johnson's".² In power of leadership and in forcefulness Bell was no match for Andrew Jackson and he had no such instinctive knowledge of what the western people wanted, in fact, while professing to represent the people directly, and criticizing Adams and Clay for lack of regard for the peoples' wishes, Bell was never a believer in following

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1. Past History, p. 8.

2. Phalan, History of Tennessee, p. 364.

blindly the dictates of the people, but he had far loftier conceptions of the duties of the government and a broader and freer conception of the part statesmanship should play in the life of the nation than Jackson.

The men of his day, especially men of the Democratic party, could see nothing but selfishness in Bell's split with his party and his leadership of the Whig party. If personal loyalty were the only test, Bell was never a good Democrat, for he would never yield up to the party or its leader his personal convictions. First of all he stood for the Union, hence his plea for concessions from the North on the tariff, yet when South Carolina nullified, he was the man who pushed the force Bill through the House of Representatives. From the very start Bell refused to follow the Jackson party over to the convention plan of nominations and in its removal of officers for partisan reasons, entered his protest against such methods and voted against them.¹ He voted against the extravagant appropriations of the

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1. Deb. Cong., XII-III, p. 2859.

administration and condemned them while he was a member of the administration as well as afterwards.¹ Bell's greatest indignation against the party for changing its principles is in the matter of the spoils system as affecting the freedom of elections. From start to finish he was anti-Jackson in that and consistent throughout. He doubted the constitutionality of internal improvements by the national government but because the principle had been adopted and the people had become convinced that it was constitutional, he would not fight the general principle but he never voted for any bill for internal improvements. His stand on the Bank was very similar. The constitutionality had been established, he defended Jackson as far as he could go with him and when he thought the country would suffer from the removal of the deposits he committed the unpardonable sin and supported the Bank.

There must always come an exact time when a man who changes from one party to another makes the shift. Up to a certain time he is presumably wholly with one party and immediately afterwards he is with the other.

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1. Cong. Globe, App. May 31, 1838, p. 358.

This gives the men whom he has left an opportunity to accuse him of being two-faced, changeable and unstable. Bell's enemies used this opportunity to its utmost limit. To one who looks carefully over his entire career in the House, it is evident that there was no sudden change, no marked shifting. He was never a real party man in the House, never an all-wool Democrat nor an Old Line Whig. He still called himself a states rights man while admittedly the leader of the Whig party in the House and never was for anything more than a nominal tariff. How much he actually accomplished after bolting the Democratic party would be difficult to tell. Whether the Democrats were thrown out of office on account of poor financial legislation, the mania for speculation, or the failure of the wheat crop, or all combined, is not a matter of much doubt. Whether they would have been equally unsuccessful without the opposition of Clay, Webster, Calhoun, John Quincy Adams, John Tyler and John Bell, is not so clear. Certainly they were not thrown out on account of their adoption of the spoils system and it was against that that Bell loosened his heaviest artillery. It may be worth while to study the life of a man of high political principles

even though he is not immediately successful in establishing his ideas. Bell became the acknowledged leader of Tennessee and won recognition for his work in the House by being appointed Secretary of War under the ill-fated Harrison administration.

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Approved by *Carl Russell Felt*

Professor of *American History*

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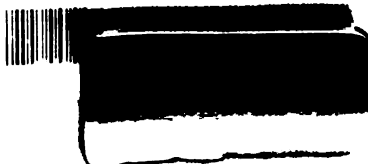
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